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The Outdoor Life in Greek and Roman Poets

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The Outdoor Life

in

Greek and Roman Poets

AND KINDRED STUDIES

BY

THE COUNTESS

EVELYN MARTINENGO CESARESCO

(Daughter of Dean Cornwallis)

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TO DEAR MEMORIES

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THIS book grew out of my own life south of the Alps. I have walked with Virgil in his fields, and listened with Theocritus to Sicilian folk-songs. The poets of the Old World became for me not dead poets but living men—living observers of things I could observe myself every day. Antiquity was not past but present.

To the sketches of outdoor life as revealed in the poetry and in a few portions of the prose literature of ancient Greece and Italy, I have added some studies of subjects connected with the scheme of the book which I always hoped to complete in its present form, though the chapters were published separately in the *Contemporary Review*. My thanks are due to the Editor for allowing me to reprint them.

Salò, Lago di Garda.

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Îles séjour des Dieux ! Hellas, mère sacrée,
Oh ! que ne suis-je né dans le saint archipel,
Aux siècles glorieux où la terre inspirée
Voyait le Ciel descendre à son premier appel !

LECONTE DE LISLE.

I

THE PEASANT OF ANCIENT GREECE

One summer day there was a young Greek who tended his few sheep and fewer goats near the Fountain Pirene. His manner of dress, the short crook with which he vainly tried to catch one of his scampering herd to obtain a draught of milk for the stranger, above all, his simple face, enclosed in long fair hair parted down the middle, might have belonged to two thousand years ago. On that face the excitements of millenniums had left no more trace than on the faces of the drooping-eared sheep. A little lower down, but still at some distance above the village of Old Corinth, is the homestead of a small peasant proprietor, a friend of the guide who had gone with me to the top of the hill, and since our efforts to get milk from the goatherd had failed, we threw ourselves on the hospitality of this humble lord of the soil. June is the most beautiful month in Greece, because in June the oleanders are in flower, but if you walk to Acro-Corinth on a June morning

you will be rather thirsty by the time you come back. It is true that I might have drunk deep of the Muses' spring, but I preferred to taste not, for the prosaic reason that ice-cold water after a hot walk is one of the best recipes for taking a fever. We sat under the mulberry-tree before the door of the cottage, and our peasant host, after washing the glasses two or three times in our presence (which is always done by the Greek people before offering you to drink), set before us good wine, with the strong resinous flavour that makes the wine far more refreshing from the astringent qualities of the resin, though it is not at first pleasant to the taste, excellent wholemeal bread, two kinds of cheese, and ripe mulberries. While we were eating, the peasant occupied himself with looking through my opera-glass, which so diverted and surprised him that he called his wife out of the house to share in the amusement. When we left I pressed on him a piece of paper money, which he had evidently neither expected nor was much pleased at receiving ; but his face brightened when I offered him my hand, which he did not kiss as a peasant in the unfrequented parts of Italy probably would have done, but shook in the perpendicular fashion represented on the ancient stelae. Greece is the only country, as far as I have noticed, where the peasants habitually shake hands among themselves, and every time that I have seen them do it I seemed

to see a scene from one of those monumental bas-reliefs which show the wife bidding a quiet good-bye to the husband, the daughter to the mother, and so on through all the ties of kindred — surely the happiest way of commemorating the dead in marble, the most tender and true and free from exaggeration. The Greek peasant of the present time, whose condition has been described by a competent authority as superior to that of any similar class in the world, is an "object-lesson" in the study of the peasantry of ancient Hellas. This is not merely the impression of a passing traveller, but is borne out by the testimony of all who have lived long in rural Greece. If a biography ought to have a portrait at the beginning, my Corinthian acquaintances may be taken as faithful portraits of the husbandmen and herdsmen some account of whom I shall endeavour to glean from the early Greek poets.

The most radiant scene is that nearest the dawn. Whether the description of the shield of Achilles was a part of the original *Iliad* or a brilliant interpolation of a later date, it must be considered our earliest glimpse of European agriculture. How full of life, how full of sun it is! The rich, deep-ploughed glebe, across which many ploughmen guided their teams, hastening to see who could first reach the boundary from which they started, where they were met by an overseer who at the end of each turn

handed them a cup of sweet wine ; the ripe, glowing cornfield where the reapers plied the sickle, the binders gathered up the sheaves, and the master, standing king-like amongst them, looked on in silent content, while under the trees servants were preparing a meal of basted meat sprinkled with white barley for all employed ; the vineyard glorious with purple grapes, which were gathered into woven baskets and then carried away by young maidens and youths whose dancing feet kept time to the sweet, pathetic song of a boy who accompanied his clear voice on the harp ; the smiling cottages, the fair meadow flecked with snowy sheep, the kine lowing near the music-making brook : golden it is, a golden life in spite of catastrophes introduced less for the sake of antithesis than from regard of truth. It is these catastrophes which allow us to believe the rest. The armed men who fall upon the piping shepherds and their happy flock, the lions which carry off the bull, represent the elements of natural strife inherent in "the unhappy constitution of a world in which living beings subsist by mutually devouring each other." But the conclusion is not Schopenhauer's; instead of "the consequent dread and distress of all that has life" there is the passionate *joie de vivre* while it lasts. Life is lovely, is worth living, though to-morrow we die ; is worth drinking at full draughts ; the whole is better than the half.

The rural background, which is kept in view by means of similes through the whole *Iliad*, shows the poet's intimate familiarity with country sights and incidents. The forest fire rushing along the tops of mountains, the winged nations of wild geese, swans, and cranes uttering shrill cries as they swoop down upon the moist meadows, the insects swarming round the shepherd's hut in the first warm days when the pails brim over with milk, the various herds of goats, cunningly separated by the goatherd if by chance they mingle—these and a hundred other images in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* recall the common open-air things of everyday observation. Beautiful and attractive girls are called "oxen-finders," because their dowry, or rather their purchase-money, was paid in oxen. There is frequent mention of bird-snaring; nets are placed in the underwood so that thrushes and doves, flying towards their nests, are entangled in them (cruel sport!); again, the vultures, circling overhead, cause the small birds to beat down upon the nets spread by the bird-snarer. Boys and countrymen go bird-nesting, the eagles and vultures make shrill lament over the loss of their unfledged nestlings. How early the inarticulate appeal of creatures mourning for their young reached the hearts of poets is shown again by the touching story in the *Iliad* of the young sparrows, not yet able to fly, huddled together in a row on the topmost branch of

a plane-tree, when a snake creeps up to devour them, which also catches the mother as she flutters close round, twittering piteously, a martyr to her love.

In the *Odyssey* the important episode of the swine-herd Eumaeus throws a flood of light on the economy of a large estate. Eumaeus was the son of an island king, or petty chief, but was kidnapped by his nurse, a Phoenician slave-woman, who escaped with him on board a Phoenician ship. She died on the voyage, and the ship having been carried by the wind to Ithaca, the sailors sold the boy to Laertes. Eumaeus was already able to walk alone, but, according to the habits of the time, he was still considered in want of maternal nourishment. He was at once made a pet of by Laertes' wife, who brought him up with her own youngest daughter, and only when he grew to be a youth did she send him to work in the fields, without, however, showing him by doing so any slight, or diminishing her affection, which lasted till she died of grief for the absence of Odysseus. Hence-forth he is to be regarded as a typical farm-servant, and neither the fact of his alleged noble birth, nor that of his nominal slavery, alters the case in the least. Though a man "lost half his manhood the day he became a slave," the position did not imply the evils and the ignominy we attach to the name. Freedom was lost—an immense loss to a Greek—but

otherwise the slave labourer and the free labourer were treated exactly alike. Sir Richard Jebb noted that there is not a single Homeric instance of a slave having an unkind master.

When Odysseus set out, Eumaeus was already working on the estate, and, in particular, he was taking care of swine. It was thought a good and respectable occupation, and I repeat there was no harshness or caprice in sending one to it who had been kept in the house as a spoilt child. This is worth insisting on, because it is characteristic of the point of view from which manual work was seen. On the estate were many upper farm-hands in the same position as that held by Eumaeus. Each of the twelve herds of cows, the twelve flocks of sheep, the eleven herds of goats, had a responsible guardian, with a staff of men and lads working under him. Every day the fattest goat and the fattest of the swine were brought home for the master's table. Eumaeus was not without the power of making some private profits, though these were not large; he bought a serving-man out of his own money, or rather its equivalent, since coinage was not known to Homer. He also built of his own accord a handsome swinery for the accommodation of the pigs, and a house for his own, with a portico under which he could sit and a neat paling all round. This work was the result of industry more than of outlay, as he

seems to have collected and conveyed the stones, cut down the wood, and done the building himself.

Odysseus, on returning to his domain, finds Eumaeus sitting under his portico, employed in making himself a pair of ox-hide shoes, which proves that he wore shoes. What followed is "known to every schoolboy," but it must not be missed out here; a lecturer on anatomy cannot suppress the backbone because every one knows what it is like. Eumaeus sees nothing in his master but a miserable-looking old beggar, but he remarks that, even had the beggar been more wretched, he would have done his best to entertain him, since all beggars and strangers are of Zeus' sending. It is his boast that, badly off though he is, he has still enough to give to the poor. A stranger or a mendicant (though of these last there are few) meets to-day with exactly the same hospitable reception wherever he goes in Greece, as my own experience testifies. Sometimes, too, he runs the same danger that Odysseus ran of being made short work of by the watch-dogs, which, with true dog-dislike of tramps and dog-indifference to Zeus, set upon the intruder and frightened Eumaeus out of his wits lest they should call down the vengeance of Heaven by tearing his guest into small pieces on his very threshold. Later Odysseus' own old dog recognises him in spite of time and in spite of rags, and wags his affectionate tail as he breathes out his

life on the dung-heap—immortal tribute to dog-love which some writers have sought to set aside, saying that there was nothing *else* to indicate that Homer had a just appreciation of dogs. As if that was not enough!

Eumaeus is evidently a good deal afraid of his own half-wild dogs; he does not trust to his voice to warn them off, but takes up stones to throw at them. Yet even they can be affectionate towards those whom they know—when Telemachus appears they fawn round him, instead of barking.

The dogs having been driven away, Eumaeus invites Odysseus into the house and prepares for him a seat of rushes, over which he throws a thick goat-skin. He would be able to entertain his guest in a far better style (he now explains) if he were not at the mercy of a worthless lot of young profligates (the suitors), his own master having long since left home, never to return. But for this, he would have received before now a nice house and three acres and a wife—a "long-wooed wife," whose bride-price he is not himself, perhaps, able to pay, or it may be that slaves were not allowed to marry until they were, if not freed, at least placed on an independent footing. Good masters, says Eumaeus, always provide in this manner for their faithful servants; a very enlightening remark. Enlightening, also, is the poignant regret which he expresses that, in con-

sequence of the reigning disorder at the palace and of Penelope's seclusion, he cannot have access to his mistress and receive her advice and kind words and little useful presents, as the custom is. The Greek great lady acted the same part in Homer's time as the English lady of the manor acts with her cottagers to-day.

Eumaeus proceeds to prepare the mid-day meal. He kills two young pigs, and dresses them for cooking. He roasts them on the spit, basting them thoroughly with white meal, and after mixing a cup of sweet wine (wine was always drunk with water) he invites the stranger to partake. These are not the prime fatted swine which have to be reserved for the suitors—to Eumaeus' intense disgust—they are only the common young pigs which are at the disposal of the swineherds. By the evening, Eumaeus, though not trusting himself to believe the statement of his guest that Odysseus is alive and well and will soon return, and though still feeling by no means sure that he is not being imposed on by a practised humbug, has, nevertheless, got into the highest state of excitement. When the swine are driven home at sunset and are entering their sties with a tremendous grunting, he casts scruples to the winds and orders the best of the herd to be slaughtered as a feast for all. Long have they toiled for the swine of the white tusks while others feasted! They have a fine

supper, washed down with red wine, while bread is served round by Mesaulius, Eumaeus' own man. After much talk they decide to go to rest and the host makes a bed for Odysseus near the fire, and covers him with a large, thick cloak ; of these, he has the two necessary for a change and no more, which he explains to his visitor, intimating that in the morning, before leaving, he must put on again the rags in which he came. Never quite assured about his guest's character, he thus cautiously guards against one of those little mistakes of a loan for a gift which have been known to take place (especially in the matter of books) at a considerably later date. The younger swineherds also sleep indoors, but Eumaeus, putting on thick clothing and taking with him his arms, goes out to sleep beside the three hundred and sixty pigs which repose under the shelter of a rock, the sows only being admitted to the covered sties.

It is well to notice how, when Telemachus arrives, Eumaeus " kisses him all over," a liberty which tells of the familiar terms existing between dependants and their masters. Imagine a French swineherd of feudal times kissing all over the son of a marquis ! It might happen in Italy where the " touch me not " part of the aristocratic idea never took much root. In fact, it did happen to an English lady who had bought some land in Romagna, and who met with

this kind of reception from her female dependants, greatly to her dismay. In Homer labourers, servants, and nurses address the grown-up members of their masters' families, if they have known them from their youth, as "my dear child," or "my sweet light." There was no "fine gentleman" fear of soiling one's hands. Telemachus helped to cut up meat, and also to clean the place after the slaughter of the suitors; not an agreeable task, but better do that than think that to work with your hands is derogatory to your dignity. Perhaps the evils once arising from fagging at English public schools were balanced by the ethical good derived from initiation into the sacred rite of toasting sausages.

On the whole, Eumaeus, though unjustly neglected in his own opinion, owing to the absence of his rightful lord, does not seem to have been so very badly off even in his worst days. There are *mandriani* or herdsmen in Italy who would be willing to change with him. Before we have done with the *Odyssey* we must glance at another agricultural type which it contains, that of the prosperous peasant proprietor of a fruit farm. This is what Laertes was, nor does it matter that he was a *roi en exil*, or to be more exact, a retired king; retired kings were as plentiful then as they are now; only the Greek could make himself a genuine peasant at a moment's notice; while king-

ship now, as a rule, seriously incapacitates a man for any other trade. Laertes' fruit farm was a pleasanter possession than most empires. It makes one in a good humour simply to think of it. There was a cheerful well-built house, round which were ranged the farm buildings and labourers' dwellings, and round these stretched the farm land. Every fig-tree and olive and pear and vine was well and properly tended; the ground was well dug, there was not a weed anywhere. We know without being told how abundantly each tree and plant bore fruit, what an air of well-being and order there was over all. Odysseus finds his father alone in the vineyard, engaged in hoeing a vine. To establish his identity, he recalls how once as a child he followed him through the orchard and teased him to give him some fruit-trees for his own. Laertes made him a present of thirteen pear-trees, ten apple-trees, and forty fig-trees with a promise of forty rows of vines, between which corn was sown as it is now. Happy Odysseus! What a modern note it is that is here struck, though the modern child, with his garden-plot and infant forest of chestnuts and oaks, has to be contented with less grand things! Be it small or great, this first taste of property teaches that inner love of plants, that interest in their growth and development from day to day, which is far removed from the mere capacity to admire a flower at a

flower-show or a fine head of asparagus when it comes to table.

In the scraps of folk-lore called the Homeric epigrams, one addressed to Glaucus, the head herdsman, recommends that the watch-dogs be fed before the gates, as they will thus be more inclined to drive off intruders. Another refers to the ancient custom of carrying a wooden swallow from house to house and asking for largess in honour of the return of Spring. It is substantially the same as the Chelidonisma quoted by Athenaeus and as the swallow-songs sung at present in the Greek islands. I do not know that there is an older piece of folk-lore on record which is still in current use.

The *Homeric Hymns* do not tell us much about agriculture, but they are penetrated by that rapture of delight in simple natural objects which was far more real once than it is now. Indeed it may be doubted if most of us understand it at all, though, perhaps, we might understand it if we recalled the absolute enjoyment felt on some day of childhood in a meadow full of cowslips ; or it may be revealed to us when after a serious illness we step out for the first time into the pleasant air and bodily weakness renders our mind less thought-bound, *men da pensier presa*, opening the way for the immediate play of emotion which, however it came about, transports us outside ourselves and fills us with the god.

Ah! then, we say to the passing moment, "Stay, thou art so fair!" But it does not stay; it gets into the first express train and we into one starting in the opposite direction.

Pan, the most captivating creation of Greek mythology, is the concrete embodiment of the feelings awakened by the woods with their fragrant undergrowth, by the wet grasses starred with daffodils; unlike the too solid gods, his kindred, Pan is half human and whole elf—a whimsical, radiant presence interpreting that something which answers, which lives and is conscious in the silence of wide spaces, the solitude of the forest recesses. The pointed rocks and snowy heights of the mountains are his; it is he who passes over the sunlit hills and scales the highest summit that commands a view of flocks scattered over the slopes; he passes quickly along the rugged chain, his soft fair hair floating in the wind; or he lingers near the streams shaded by thickets; or he reclines in meadows full of crocus and hyacinth and sings so sweetly that no bird pouring forth his soul amongst the first leaves can ever sing sweeter. This is the Pan of the *Homeric Hymns*, who with little change flits through antiquity till the voice on the Ionian Sea announces that Pan is dead, and dead with him is the first youth of the world.

Close after the Homeric literature comes the

work which was regarded while the ancient civilisation lasted as the permanent text-book and scriptures of husbandry. The extraordinary reverence in which it was held would make the *Book of Days* of Hesiod interesting even if it were not of great interest in itself as a document in the study of archaic manners. The importance ascribed to it by an imaginative race shows how fallacious it is to judge a people by only one side of their character. Hesiod was a *verista*, a rather morose *verista* who had not kept a single illusion. His advice is the essence of plain common sense tinged a little with pessimism. He makes the Boeotian peasant stand before us as clearly as the Dutch peasant in the "Village Fête" of Teniers. Many of his precepts are no less sound now than they were in his own day. Keep out of lawsuits, he says; keep out of debt. It is a dreadful thing to grow old and find oneself in want. Get a youth of fifty as your labourer ("un ragazzo di quarant' anni" is an expression I have heard used by an Italian sempstress); if you have a younger man he will work by fits and starts and throw his energy away on trifles; besides, he is sure to be always talking! Choose an unmarried maidservant, women with children eat too much (and have been known to hide something in their aprons for the bairns). Give your labourer a good allowance of bread, and in winter give him

more than in summer, because the cold sharpens the appetite. The oxen, on the other hand, need less hay in winter as they do less work—a point open to dispute. The ox is at his best for labour at nine years old, he has left off being skittish. (Now we should say that he was at his best at six.) Boys are handy for scaring birds. Hesiod has the genuine farmer's grudging spirit about the birds' small pillage. After twelve years old (no abuse of child-labour here, at any rate) boys should be given something to do and not allowed to sit idle on the wayside tombs and public seats, or they will be lazy as long as they live. This is a wise counsel, so is the following: Do not go hanging about blacksmiths' forges and other places of public resort; in short, do not go to the *osteria*. Any one who knows peasant life knows what happens when a man begins to loaf. An artisan may loaf and work alternately; the peasant who loafs will loaf for ever. Nature is no loafer and will not wait, and who of her servants waits till to-morrow finds there is no to-morrow. The idle peasant, too, grows quarrelsome and ends by running his knife into his neighbour; though this is an original remark of the writer's and not of the poet under consideration.

Winter is a miserable time. Hesiod does not seize one glimpse of the gaiety of Virgil's winter. The north wind lashes the kine, the snow drives

along the valley, the rain soaks one to the skin. Old age with his staff—the "three-footed man," bent in back, his grey head bowed towards the ground, always wretched, is now more utterly wretched than usual. Only indoors the young daughter of the house does not shiver; her mother keeps her in lest her hands should get chapped. She remains fair and calm and tenderly cared for while all is wild without. One would like the pretty maiden just as well if she made herself warm by running in the wind and was not afraid of the colour given by Jack Frost; still hers is a winning picture, one of the very few soft touches on Hesiod's hard canvas.

The sensible peasant dresses warmly; plenty of homespun linen underneath, and a goatskin overcoat; good ox-hide shoes and wool socks. He fares on the flesh of young oxen and kids, goats' milk and wine and water are his drinks. He will do well not to marry till he is thirty, when he is to take a wife of fifteen. Pray heaven she may not turn out a gossip; a gossiping wife is the worst of evils. One child is quite enough. It is curious to find this prudent reflection at so early a date, when we should have expected that children, who if they bring more mouths also bring more hands, would have been rather desired than otherwise. But, like the French peasant, Hesiod was of opinion that a large family was more trouble than it was worth, though he

piously adds, that if the number increases, the gods may kindly provide for them after all. It is certain that what he was thinking about was chiefly the disposal of the property—just as it is what most occupies the thoughts of the rural French—and the difficulty of avoiding general ruin as well as a perpetual state of loggerheads, should the necessity arise of parcelling out the farm into minute lots. There are also the marriage expenses to scrape together. When there was a good harvest the young men and maidens rejoiced, as it brought them the prospect of marriage by increasing the peasant's store.

Rural theft is not a novelty. Be sure, says Hesiod, to have a house-dog with good teeth, and feed him well, that he may ward off the "day-sleep-wake-night man," who comes to rob you of your hay and other possessions. Above all, he insists, work, work, work! Do not put off till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day. Do not find excuses for sloth in the weather, the season, what-not. There is always something to be done. Is the harvest gathered, there is still wood to be hewn, ploughs to be fashioned, a hundred tasks for rainy days, for the winter, even for the night. Without grinding, incessant work, the little proprietor comes to grief with mathematical certainty. Even work he never so well, the earth, "sad nurse of all that die," may

make a bad return. Possibly he lives in some squalid malarious village where he loses his health and the fruits of his toil; only such an eventuality can justify a man in risking his fortune at sea. Thucydides said that an arid soil made a great nation because it forced men to become sailors. Hesiod did not consider the gain to the State and he saw nothing but probable loss to the individual. He regards it as an act of folly in any one, who is moderately well off, to leave dry land out of longing for speculation or greed of money—a very bad quality this last, he says. Yet, even when not pressed by things going wrong at home, the peasant along the littoral must often have felt, then as now, the fascination of maritime ventures. We remember the old peasant in that most powerful of realistic novels, Verga's *I Malavoglia*, who risked and lost his all in a cargo of lentils. To such as are determined, cost what it may, to launch into speculation, Hesiod gives the advice to begin in a small way, and not stake everything in one throw. But it is safer to let it alone; *le mieux est l'ennemi du bien*, content, though not happiness, is wisdom, *the half is better than the whole*:

> Chi troppo in alto va cade sovente
> Precipitevolissimevolmente.

Renunciation, as Goethe taught, is the sole rational rule of life; it is no good having too high ideals for

yourself or for other people ; Prometheus was a fool, and deserved his fate. One might go on for an hour paraphrasing the most famous of Hesiod's sayings, which, perhaps, was not his, but was already a proverb. The concentrated caution of every nation has produced its equivalent. In England the oftenest quoted variant is that " Enough is as good as a feast," which so irritated poor Richard Jefferies, and which he said was so contrary to Nature's own imperial spendthrift ways.

Hesiod's lucky and unlucky days are only a little further elaboration of the modern Italian peasant's respect for the phases of the moon : for the world he would not cut down trees or dig up potatoes in the first quarter nor sow wheat in the last ; he carries in his head a traditional almanac marked in black and white, which he consults before performing any important or trifling action. In Greece itself everything is regulated by saints' days. Needless to say how widely diffused is the old poet's belief that ill-disposed persons bewitch or hypnotise cows and horses. According to Hesiod the Pleiades indicate harvest and seed-time, the latter being also announced by the cry of the cranes, whose periodic flight profoundly impressed all these early observers. Theognis speaks of the crane as the harbinger of the ploughing-season, whose shrill voice smote his heart with the thought that others possessed his flourishing fields, and that

no longer his mules dragged the bent yoke of the plough. He had been despoiled of his property while on a voyage. Hesiod had also lost his paternal acres, and in the cruellest way, some manœuvre of his brother having deprived him of them; but his misfortunes did not teach him sentiment. He could be generous though, since it is said that he helped this ne'er-do-well brother out of the little he had. We can guess a good deal from the maxim: "Better trust your own brother than your friend." He whose advice was to be venerated long after he was dead had doubtless bestowed it without the slightest effect on the scapegrace whom so-called friends led easily astray by flattery. A Christian saint once commended Hesiod's works especially to the attention of the young. "What other end," asks Basil the Great in a passage which is noteworthy because it shows that the poet was still popular among Greek populations in the fourth century—"What other end can we suppose that Hesiod had in view when he made those verses which are sung by everybody, if it were not to render virtue attractive to young men?"

Hesiod had the feelings and even the prejudices of a gentleman of the old school. He had no patience with those who run after the *nouveau riche*, but he respected poverty, and would not have the good man left alone in his need. This son of a petty and not thriving farmer grasped the relation of decorous

manners to a decorous life : "Do not pare your nails at table," he said. Had he frequented sundry *tables d'hôte* in the twentieth century, he would have added, "Do not eat with your knife." Besides being a realist, he was somewhat of a Puritan, and if he says nothing about music and dancing in his *Book of Days* it is to be inferred that those amusements were not much to his taste. He recognised, however, the position of the minstrel, and observed that the quarrels and jealousies of that profession, as of others, were of advantage in the long run, as they promoted competition. Alas, that musicians should have so early proved dis-harmonious! Though intensely orthodox, yet he saw that in matters of religion the intention is everything. He tells you to take care not to scoff at any poor little rustic shrine or altar, raised by some simple soul on the roadside, which you may pass on your way.

There is an ampler truth, a more real reality, which they only possess who have been up the mountain and have seen the other side. Hesiod had not seen the other side of the mountain ; hence he had his limits, though within these he was very just. He had none of the Homeric admiration for a dignified and fine old man ; he looked upon old age as simply horrible. His most golden dream was of a sleep which should overtake the vigorous man in his prime. He would not have been able to

understand the exquisite pathos which a Greek poet of a softer age and clime, Leonidas of Tarentum, threw into his pictures of the wane of life : that of the old fisherman who falls asleep in his reed hut after his long toil, as the light fails when the oil is spent ; that of the old spinning-woman, who has earned her bread spinning, spinning through her eighty years, and ever humming her song as she span, till the withered hand sinks on the withered knee, and her work and her days end together. Here is another euthanasia than any Hesiod could have divined : the sweet and solemn rest "when that which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home."

II

HUSBANDRY IN THE GREEK DRAMATISTS

In the spring when the new wine was drawn off, the great festival of Dionysus was held with appropriate hymns and songs and games. The young men joined in a kind of masquerade; there were matches between the villages, and one village or one company of singers or one single singer became more famous than the rest. Then dialogue was introduced, at first, probably, in the form of chaff bandied to and fro during the intervals between the choric songs. The performers were called "goat-singers" either because they were dressed in goat-skins to imitate satyrs, or because they contended for the prize of a goat, or again, from the sacrifice of a goat to the god. It strikes me that they may have gone from house to house carrying a goat-skin to collect largess for the festival, as the children went round with the wooden swallow. So people would have said: "Here are the 'goat-singers' come back." The

word "tragedy" is derived from a goat-song. One theory has been started that the god also had a winter festival when sorrowful and pathetic songs were sung instead of songs of mirth. Be that as it may, the local folk-fêtes of Attica prepared the way for Aeschylus. The origin of tragedy (as of comedy) was, as Aristotle said, "rude and unpremeditated." It is true that, as with all the arts of Greece, we must look to religion for its primal inspiration: if there had not been the god there would not have been the goat-singers. But the god embodied the spirit of country-life, and tragedy came into existence under the most rural of rural conditions. Like all literature, it was born of folk-lore.

When, however, the drama became a great literary and patriotic institution, it became the possession of townspeople who had no great sympathy with country things. Athens, the violet-crowned, was as far as possible from having the significance of smoke and darkness of a modern metropolis; how far, any one can still realise who stands in that alley in the king's garden where, above the lovely leafage of bay and myrtle, ilex and oleander, the temples of the Acropolis suddenly appear against the clear sky, nothing else of the outer world being visible, while the faint hum of the modern city is drowned in the song of nightingales. Nevertheless, morally as well as materially, a town it was, in the most intense

sense of the word; and it is doubtful if the Athenians would have appreciated an attempt to "bring the scent of the hay across the footlights." We cannot expect to learn very much about contemporary agriculture from the Greek dramatists, though such hints as are to be gathered from them on the subject are by no means without value.

Aeschylus was the first writer to scout the idea of an early golden era, and to recognise that primitive man had a life so hard and miserable that the most unlucky of his descendants might own himself to be better off. His description of human beings before Prometheus came to their aid has been truly said to be a correct account of the Stone Age. In the *Persians* Aeschylus describes a service for the dead such as in his day was certainly often performed by the pastoral or village Hellenes, whose ritual the poet transported among their enemies without any pangs of conscience. The beautiful lines refer to the libation :

> Milk from the flawless firstling of the herd,
> Honey, the amber soul of perfumed meads,
> And water sparkling from its maiden source :
> Here, too, the juice of immemorial vine
> And scented fruit, rich gift of tawny olive
> That never knows a season of decay,
> And flowers, the little children of the earth
> Disposed in garlands.

So fair an offering might cheer the saddest ghost!

Fain would one forget that the same people could represent their heroes as gratified by the Dahomey slaughter of innocent girls upon their tombs. Rites of the sort mentioned by Aeschylus formed the rustic obsequies both in Greece and in Italy. To this day, in the island of Sardinia, where many ancient customs are preserved, flowers and simple fruits, such as nuts, are thrown into the open grave.

Not remote among the landscapes of a golden age, but present in the fairyland which is somewhere—somewhere on this actual earth, is the country by the sea of Sophocles, a dream that, out of childhood, knows that it is a dream and yet delights the dreamer :

> . . . Where each day is matured
> The plant of Bacchus. In the morning's sheen
> With blooming growth the land luxuriates,
> Then by midday the unripe fruit expands,
> And as day wanes the clusters purple o'er ;
> At evening all the crop is gathered in
> And the wine draught is mixed.

In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the old herdsman distinguishes between a "bought slave" and one bred in his master's house, and in a passage spoken directly after by the Corinthian messenger, there is an interesting reference to the practice still in force of sending the flocks from the plains to the mountains from March to September :

. . . Sure I am
He knows when in the region of Cithaeron
He with two flocks and I with only one—
I was his neighbour during three whole seasons,
From springtide e'en to autumn for six months,
But during winter I my flock drove off
Unto my sheep-cotes, he to Laius' stalls.

In the same play the evil ways of Egypt are reproved, where men sit indoors weaving at the loom and their wives earn their daily bread abroad in the fields—one of the many proofs that in Greece women were put to do no hard outdoor work, though the girls helped in gathering the grapes. In one or two places Sophocles speaks of horses or mules ploughing, and it seems that by the better-to-do peasants or landowners they were preferred to oxen. The colts were allowed to run wild till they were of an age to work, when the advent of their servitude was marked by their manes being cut short, a barbarous operation against which Sophocles' generous spirit revolted. "I mourn for my tresses," runs one of his fragments, "as doth a filly who, caught and carried off by the herdsman, hath her chestnut mane shorn from her neck by a rugged hand in the horse-stables, and then, turned into a meadow with limpid brooks, sees her image clearly reflected with all her mane disgracefully shorn off. Who, however ruthless, would not pity her, as she crouches affrighted, driven mad by shame, groaning for her vanished mane?" Horse-

breeding must have presented serious difficulties in a country so generally arid as much of Greece was even then ; the best horses were brought over from Asia Minor, and the race deteriorated after a few generations. That Athens could all the same be addressed as the "breeder of horses," shows that the conviction of the national importance of the horse induced the Athenians to overcome all obstacles, and also, probably, that the country people of Attica were led to give great care and attention to horse-breeding by the high prices offered for good animals.

Far from the early Greek mind was the contempt for the cultivator which generated a vocabulary of ugly names, boor, clout, clodhopper, with many more, and turned *vilain* into villain. But the amenities of civilisation and the overwhelming weight attached to purely intellectual development tend towards the depreciation of the peasant whose philosophy is not of the Schools, and Euripides perhaps gave expression to a growing sentiment when he made his Hector say, as Homer's Hector would not have said :

> Full prone the mind of rustics is to folly.

But in justice to Euripides it should not be forgotten that he created one beautiful peasant type ; a type that has grown into a literary race of high-minded peasants or serfs whose derivation often passes unnoticed. Euripides never drew a more

distinct character, though the touches are few, than that of Auturgus, to whom Aegisthus married Electra in the hopes that the slur of so unfitting an alliance might prevent her from getting her rights as Agamemnon's daughter. Clytemnestra would have probably objected to her being killed; the next best thing, Aegisthus thought, was to marry her below her rank. But Auturgus defeated the device by becoming simply the respectful protector of the royal maiden. He is called "old," but it is clear that he was not much more than middle-aged as he is not past doing hard and incessant work. Though poor, he comes of a noble stock, a statement that does not affect his position as a true peasant any more than the kidnapping story about Eumaeus made him less of a swineherd. Very likely it was all true. How many illustrious names are owned by Italian peasants; nay, in how many cases it is known that only two or three generations ago a peasant family which now lives on polenta would have been recognised as equals by the highest in the land. Something fairer in the skin, something more gracious in their mien, is all that is left to distinguish them from the great mass of cultivators. For the rest, their feelings, their manners, their appearance are of these. Auturgus is a peasant through and through. He has the austere gravity impressed by a life spent close to nature, watchful of the fated

return of her signs, face to face with the solemn sequence of her seasons. Gently he chides Electra for working at all; he would not have her toil, she was not trained for it. She answers that it is her pleasure to help him as far as she can; the labourer coming home tired, likes to find all in order in his house. So he consents to her fetching the water if such be her will; the spring is not far off. As for him, at earliest dawn he will yoke his oxen and go to plough; idle wretches who are always invoking the gods never earn a livelihood. As soon as he is assured of the respectability of the two strangers, who are really Orestes and Pylades, he asks them into his house; what there is, is at their service; a woman can easily improvise a little feast. There is enough in the cottage for one day, at least, and if the food be simple, hunger is a good sauce. He has a fine indifference to their seeing his poverty, and that genuine instinct of hospitality which is satisfied when you know that you have offered of your best. "Di quello che c' è non manca niente," as they say in Tuscany. So Auturgus passes from the scene, true peasant and true gentleman—a combination not rare some thousand years ago, not rare now.

Two of the comedies of Aristophanes deal more or less directly with agricultural affairs, the *Acharnians* and the *Peace*. In the former, the hero, Dicaeopolis, though a citizen of Athens, is, before all

things, a country farmer. His heart is with his farm, for which he longed, "which never said 'buy fuel,' or 'vinegar,' or 'oil,' but of itself produced all things, and the 'buy' was absent." In this play there is one of the hits against Euripides because his mother sold watercresses ; Aristophanes thought it degrading to work for your bread. Tired of the Peloponnesian War, which had gone on for six years, Dicaeopolis negotiates a private peace for himself and his family. He is the "peace-at-any-price" farmer, who excites great indignation among his more patriotic or Chauvinist fellow-countrymen ("Marathon men" and other old growlers), but who goes his way unheeding. He buys eels and all sorts of delicacies from the enemy, who may traffic with him alone. He is perfectly content, and indifferent to the sufferings of his neighbours ; nay, he takes a positive pleasure in enjoying what they are without.

If there were peace, sigh the Acharnian chorus, "then would they plant a long row of vines, young fig-trees, and olives, all round the estate. What use to plant now for the spoiler ?"

While Dicaeopolis is greedily watching his contraband thrushes and other dainties being cooked, another and the saddest victim of the war comes in who has something worse to rue than the lack of eels or hares : the eternal victim, the husbandman. In

all Greek tragedy there are few things more tragic than this sudden entrance of misery into a farce. The Boeotians have carried off the poor man's team, his land lies fallow :

> I'm ruinated
> Quite and entirely, losing my poor beasts,
> My oxen, I've lost 'em, both of 'em.—FRERE.

His eyes are dim with weeping for his oxen. In vain he begs for the least drop of peace, which he seems to think a kind of quack medicine, kept in bottles. With the ineffable egotism of the Sybarite, Dicaeopolis bids him be off "to weep somewhere else." He goes, repeating, "Woe's me for the oxen which tilled my ground."

Trygaeus, in the *Peace*, is a much superior person to Dicaeopolis, who, living long in towns, had succeeded in mixing up the mania for luxury of the vulgar citizen with the stolid narrowness of the most benighted provincial. Trygaeus is the country-dweller in the strictest and the best sense. He has learnt, from his stake in the country, to love the fatherland and understand its interests. He, too, desires peace ; not, however, for himself alone, but for all the sore-tried land. He risks a great deal to accomplish his purpose, embarking on a novel and daring exploit on behalf of all the Greeks. He risks coming to a bad end and becoming a subject for a tragedy by Euripides—dreadful fate ! That

he went to heaven on the back of an unpleasant beetle does not lessen his moral virtue.

When he is engaged in getting Peace out of the hole in which she was imprisoned, all sorts of people try to aid him, but only the husbandmen succeed. In reward, they are sent off to till their fields, and Trygaeus follows to break up the long desolate earth of his little farm and return to the old, sweet, inexpensive pleasures, cakes of dried fruits, figs and myrtles and sweet new wine, and the violet-bed near the well, and the desired olives!

Peace alone, says Aristophanes, is the end of all who lead an agricultural life. Little do the talkers in the towns, who get up wars, know of the wretchedness they bring the husbandman! Lions at home, foxes in battle, they contrive to save their skin and their chattels, while the peasant loses both. But with peace, how enviable is the country lot! How pleasant is it to *far merenda* (the Italian word expresses the sense exactly which "picnic" does not) some autumn afternoon, when the soft providential rain is falling on the sown fields, and the wood sawn in summer crackles on the hearth. You will call your wife to roast some kidney-beans and bring out some figs and a thrush, and a bit of hare, and call in a neighbour to share the simple feast, and remember to reserve a bit for the old father, and send the maid to call the man from the

field, for to-day is wet and he cannot hoe or strip off the vine-leaves.

When Trygaeus goes home he finds that war has lasted so long that the boys know only war-like songs, but he would have the old songs back, such as, "Thus they feasted on the flesh of oxen." The poet complains more than once that the "old songs" are being forgotten. "The Shearing of the Ram," for instance, of Simonides, which everybody once knew, was out of fashion with the *jeunesse dorée*. The craze for progress had penetrated even into the country; a theme illustrated in the *Clouds*, the comedy which has never been entirely cleared from the tragic suspicion of having been instrumental in causing the death of Socrates. Strepsiades, who began with driving goats, dressed in a leather jerkin, is the pattern of the enriched peasant, dense in intelligence; a sort of Attic prototype of Verga's "Don Gesualdo"; the fore-doomed victim of his spend-thrift relations. Phidippides, the graceless but superficially sharp-witted son, who even in his sleep dreams about horses, and whose only care is to waste his father's store, gathers from the new theories taught in the Thinking-shop a mass of arguments to defend his conduct which so enrages his father, who had sent him there in the hope of reforming him, that he ends by burning the place down.

If Aristophanes has given some unlovely pictures

of country-folk, when he paints Nature himself, he never fails in that lyric ecstasy which is what made him an immortal poet and not simply a comic dramatist. The heavenly gift in him was precisely the appreciation of natural things—the song of birds, the flowery meads, the season of spring when the plane-tree whispers to the elm. Appreciation carried to the point where it becomes interpretation, counts for ninety per cent in poetic genius.

Up to a certain point there is a great uniformity in the Greek view of nature when it is considered that, measuring by time, we might expect as much divergence as between the views of Chaucer and Wordsworth. It is always curious to reflect that, while Roman poetry is nearly crushed into a century, the Greek covers, from first to last, a space as large as modern literature. Throughout the whole period may be observed a positive enjoyment of pure beauty that was much keener, as I have said once before, than any the modern world knows of. The narcissus does not give the joy to us that it gave the ancient Greek, in spite of the narcissus farms in the Scilly Isles. That spontaneous and unanalysed joy is the permanent keynote of the Greek nature-song. But the keynote may be the same while the tune is different, and a change did appear latterly in the Greek way of looking at natural phenomena; the tendency grew to associate them with human rather

than with divine affairs. The heavenly bodies, for instance, instead of compelling thoughts of godhead, become the hands of a clock which bid man go about his daily tasks, as in this very modern passage from the *Rhesus* of Euripides :

> Whose watch is it ? Who is it takes my place ?
> The earliest signs are setting, the seven Pleiades
> Show in the sky. The eagle through mid heaven
> Flees. Why delay ! Rise from your beds to watch !
> Awake ! The moon's bright splendour see ye not !
> The dawning, yea, the dawning close approaches,
> And this is one of the forerunning stars.

III

THE ATTIC HOMESTEAD

Xenophon's work on agriculture lacks the divine afflatus of the *Georgics* and the patient, comprehensive research of Varro's *De re rustica*; its more modest scope is shown by the name he gave it: the *Oeconomicus*, or as Etienne de la Boétie rendered it, *La Mesnagerie*—a capital word that has gone down in life! Xenophon traced the rule of the farm on rather general lines; he starts from the principle that, in the main, agriculture is made up of common sense and diligence. To critics who blame him as unscientific, I would submit that in Southern farming, at least, these two qualities will carry the cultivator farther than the most beautiful steam-plough. The standpoint from which he viewed the agriculturist was not without elevation, though it did not strike him, as it struck Virgil, that the husbandman was a sort of high priest. But neither did he regard him as the mere servant of private and selfish ends. The landed proprietor was

the pillar of Society, and agriculture the life-blood of the State; the fields grew more than corn—they grew men. This was his point of view. Cultivating the land becomes a source of pleasure to its possessor, of prosperity to his house, of health to his body, which it fits for all the duties of the free man. The Earth gives both the necessaries and the charms of life. The lovely and fragrant garlands with which we deck the altars are bestowed by her. She yields a thousand varieties of nourishment, she feeds the war-horse, she toughens the sinews of the soldier. The soil inspires its tillers with the will to die in its defence. How hospitable is the country to its guests! How joyous the blazing fire on the hearth in winter, the cool, shady groves in summer! What more inspiring than a rural religious *fête*? What life is pleasanter for the workers, more delightful for the wife, more salubrious for the children, more generous for friends? The land which brings forth its increase in proportion to our zeal in cultivating it, teaches the primal law of justice. We learn from husbandry to do to others as we would that they should do unto us. The wise husbandman encourages his labourers not less than a general his soldiers, "for hope is as necessary to slaves as it is to free men." (In the army Xenophon was called "the soldier's friend"; he knew what could be done with men by moral influence.)

No writer was ever more sincere ; he adorns nothing and speaks from his own experience, which is that of a man of the world who has made no excursions into the clouds. He does not put his own hand to the plough, but he is a firm believer in the axiom that it is the master's eye which soonest fattens the horse. It is absurd to own an estate and know nothing about its management. Nevertheless, he does not counsel perpetual attention to business ; he would have agreed that "no play" makes very dull boys. He looked upon the pleasures of a country life as not less actually profitable than its duties. What was the chase? A nursery for strategists. What was riding across country? A school for cavalry. Four hundred years later the Latin writer on agriculture, Columella, criticised sport as folly and waste of time ; Xenophon could not have imagined life in the country without it, but he ennobled the pastime by the skill he brought to it. He aimed at excellence in all he attempted. He was the finest rider of his day and his little treatise on horsemanship has won the praise of every writer on the subject from then till now. The Attic phrase of "handsome and good" suited him both in its metaphorical and its literal sense, for he was distinctly an *homme du bien*, and his good looks were famous. Besides his love of open-air athletics he had other Anglo-Saxon characteristics,

such as the colonising instinct joined to affection for home and the taste for adventure without the tastes of the adventurer. But he possessed the defects of his qualities: he had no idealism or "inwardness"; the problems of mind did not interest him; he left the Incomprehensible to take care of itself. What interested him in Socrates was the man, and it is the man that he makes known to us. But for Xenophon we might have missed in Socrates that moral perfection which Goethe rated the highest of all—the reverence for those below us. Xenophon's Socrates not only talks affably to all sorts of people; he can actually draw instruction out of them. How gracious he is in the scene of the performing children! How courteously he addresses the showman, how readily he appreciates the cleverness of the little dancing girl! So far from despising the exhibition of a poor little troop of wandering jugglers, he says seriously ("after reflection") that the child's skill in throwing up and catching her hoops and dancing in time to the music has confirmed a conclusion to which he has been coming for a long time, namely, that women are nowise inferior to men save in physical strength and perhaps, a little, in mental balance. They can learn all things, if properly taught, as quickly and as well as men. When, afterwards, the child performs a blood-curdling feat of jumping head downwards into a circle of swords, he gently remarks that this

is, no doubt, very dangerous, but what possible good is there in it? Is there beauty in contortion? Would it not be less hurtful to the pretty children and more pleasing to the spectators if they danced to the flute dressed as nymphs or graces? The Sicilian showman, humanised for the moment, as were all who came within Socrates' influence, acts on the hint and improvises the little pantomime with which the banquet ends.

When the question of training women comes up in the *Oeconomicus*, Socrates makes no plea for educating their higher faculties, and this has been supposed to prove that he was indifferent on the matter. But he was not in the habit of proposing alterations in the existing conditions of life; he took men just as they were, believing that their souls, or moral part, could be improved through their minds, or intellectual part, rather than by any change in outward circumstance. Still, it cannot be doubted that since he admired Aspasia's mental attainments, he would have been glad if her sisters, who thought themselves so much better than she, had not been so far behind her in humane culture. He granted that women could learn, and Plato's thoroughly revolutionary views on women's education are only the logical development of this principle. Plato wished girls and boys to be taught everything alike, even to fencing and riding. He admitted that the very best men were

superior to the very best women, but since many women are more gifted than many men, why should not they have an equal chance? No one would dispute this now, but it must have sounded midsummer madness at Athens, whose women had no place in society at all. Theoretically they might go to the theatre when tragedies were performed, but it seems unlikely that the ladies of the upper classes often went there. They had no opportunity of joining in conversation with the other sex except in the case of their nearest relations; this continued to be the case down to a late period. Cornelius Nepos remarks that what is thought respectable in one place appears quite the reverse in another; so while every Roman brought his wife to the feast, such an act would excite horror in Greece. There seems to have been no equivalent to the tea-gardens (without tea) of Turkish cities, where you may see the veiled ladies laughing and chattering among themselves as though they had never a care. A mild form of amusement, but better than none.

The Greek little girl was happy. She was the pet still more of her father than of her mother. She had dolls with jointed limbs which possessed their proper names, their outfits, their baby-houses and furniture. She played at numberless games, but the favourites were ball and knuckle-bones. A lovely Tanagra figure shows the Greek girl playing

at this last universal game, which is also represented as the sport of Niobe's daughters in a well-known fresco found at Pompeii. I am still looking for a part of the world where it is not played ; I, myself, once played a match with a gipsy child at Granada and lost it. When the Greek girl reached the mature age of seven she was expected to offer her toys to Artemis, a sacrifice recalled in some pretty lines in the *Anthology*. But I think that the goddess gave back at least the ball—a game of ball was recommended by Greek physicians as the best exercise after the bath. Artemis herself lives for ever as the eternal girl, following the stag on the mountains and the wild boar along the wind-swept summits, but coming back to lead the dance, beautifully dressed, and not disdainful of feminine tasks, for is she not known as Artemis of the golden distaff?

Sophocles described the young girl rejoicing in the flowery meads of her youth, till the maiden becomes wife and mother and learns to know the painful watches of the night, spent in anxiety for husband and children. It would have been well for her if such anxiety, the common lot of all, had been the sole cause of trouble to the Athenian wife. It seems that ill-assorted unions were rather frequent at Athens, and if her home was unhappy, what had she to fall back on? A man, as Medea says, whose home was unpleasing to him, could go abroad and

enjoy the company of his friends, "but *we* must look for happiness to one alone."

From the very beginning, from the Homeric Age, the Greek had known *what* it was that made a happy marriage. "May the gods grant thee a husband and a home and a mind at one with him," Odysseus says to Nausicaa, "for there is nothing nobler than when man and wife are of one heart and mind in a house, a grief to their foes and to their friends great joy: but their own hearts know it best."

It often happened that marriages were made up by third persons who described inaccurately the affianced couple to one another; a fraud for condemning which Socrates praises Aspasia. Mischief was the result. The bridegroom was not extremely young; thirty was thought to be a suitable age for a man to marry at, but the bride was sometimes a mere child, as we see from the charming little romance of "The Wife of Ischomachus," for the better understanding of which I have strayed into these few remarks on Athenian womanhood. It forms by far the most original feature in the *Oeconomicus*, and though it must be taken with several grains of salt, it is still the best description we have of a Greek interior.

Socrates observed that while the wife's power in the household is only second to the husband's, she is

the last person to whom he speaks openly about his affairs, of which she commonly knows less than his most casual acquaintances. This may be said to be the text of the story which follows. Of Ischomachus nothing is known except a shadowy mention in Plutarch, but from what we do know of Xenophon it is impossible to doubt that, in this instance, he is, if not telling his own story, at least ventilating his own ideas. Socrates is supposed to meet Ischomachus in the portico of the Temple of Zeus the Liberator. He asks him how it is that he has a healthy colour and time to spare, though all Athens declares that his estate is the best managed in Attica. To this Ischomachus replies, that he can go where he likes, because his wife is perfectly qualified to manage everything at home. Socrates enquires if this inestimable helpmeet learnt her duties from her father and mother. Ischomachus answers that this was impossible; when he married her she was scarcely fifteen—what could she have learnt but how to spin and card the wool and give it out to the maids? She had been brought up to have simple tastes; that was a good foundation, but all the rest she had learnt from him. Then Socrates begs him to tell him all about it—he would sooner listen than see the finest horse-race. And so would we.

In Greek marriages, love was post-nuptial; the wooing began with the wedding instead of ending

with it. The little bride was very timid, very shy; the first thing to be done was to gain her confidence. Ischomachus prudently did not begin his lectures till the honeymoon was waning. He simply prayed the gods to grant him the wisdom to teach and his bride the heart to learn all those things that were needed to make their union holy and happy. She joined willingly in the prayer, which he thought a good sign for the future. Then he waited till they had got to know each other and to speak familiarly on different subjects. Even when the schooling begins in earnest, behind the teacher there is still the lover. Nothing flatters a very young girl so much as to speak to her seriously of serious things; for the rest, the wife of Ischomachus would have shown but little wit had she failed to seize what there was of elevated, pure, and true in the picture presented to her of a woman's rôle. The prosaic details and the narrowness of the canvas should not blind us to the fact that the Greek conception of marriage *lies at the very root of all Western civilisation.*

After the interval allowed for "becoming acquainted," Ischomachus asks his wife whether she begins to understand why he married her. She most certainly knew that there would have been no trouble in finding another wife for him, another husband for her. Why did he choose her? Why did her parents choose him? Was it not because it

appeared to both sides that they were truly fitted for each other, and also fitted to serve the higher objects of matrimony as heads of a household and founders of a new family? If the Divine Powers gave them children they would join together to bring them up aright, and the reward would not fail them of having good children to bless their old age. But even now, without waiting for that sacred bond, *all they possessed was in common.* All that was the wife's she had already given, and now he does the same, he gives her all that is his. It is no more a question of which of the two furnished the most, but it is well to realise that the one who manages best the common store is the one who brings the most valuable contribution to it. "But how can I help? What can I do?" asks the young wife; "you manage everything; my mother only told me that 'I was to do what was right.'" Ischomachus says that he received the same advice from his father; but that husband and wife did not do right if they neglected to watch over the property and to improve it. "But how," the wife asks again, "can she help?" Ischomachus says that this is the task marked out for her alike by the gods and by the laws. Each has an allotted share; to the man fall heat and cold, long journeys and wars; to the woman household duties. The first of all these is the care of children —to which end the gods have implanted in woman's

heart an infinite need of loving little creatures. Next comes the care of the household ; to point which moral Ischomachus extols the queen-bee, though a somewhat closer knowledge of natural history would have made him select that far more intelligent housekeeper, the mother-wasp. He develops the idea that marriage is a divine institution in view to the children, a social institution in view to the property. Your duty to God is to bring up your children well ; your duty to the State is to foster and not waste your substance. Of course the conception of thrift as a national virtue is absolutely correct, but its practical application is foreign to English ways of thought. Frugal living and a strict look-out over expenditure suggest a tinge of meanness to the English soul. Ischomachus saw nothing mean in saving since it enabled him to give nobly to religion, to help his friends in their need, and to contribute munificently to the embellishment of the city. It would be useless to rehearse all the items of domestic economy which Ischomachus impresses on his docile pupil. She is charged with the care not only of the provisions for the table, but also of the farm produce which is brought to be stored at home or to be employed for spinning and weaving. The counsels of prudence are summed up in the admonition : "To see that we do not spend in a month what ought to last for a year." One piece of advice touches a higher note ;

"There is one thing," says Ischomachus, "which, perhaps, you will not think very pleasant; it is, that when one of your slaves is ill, you ought to look after him yourself and do all you can for his recovery." "Ah!" she cries, "there is nothing that I shall like to do more than this; they will love me for it!"—an answer with which Ischomachus was justly delighted, and which evoked from him the most beautiful little speech that any husband ever made to any wife: "But the sweetest reward will be when, having become more perfect than I, you have made me your servant; when as youth and beauty pass, you will not fear to lose your influence, because, in growing old, you will become a still better companion to me, a better helper to your children, a more honoured mistress of your home."

Ischomachus tells his wife that she should take the trouble to instruct stupid or backward slaves in their tasks; they may then become in time capable and devoted servants, priceless treasures in the house. He goes more fully into the management of slaves when he deals with the farm bailiff. He says that like other animals men are influenced by rewards and punishments. Noble souls are excited to do their utmost by the desire of praise, ignoble ones by convincing them that virtue pays. The first thing to secure is the good-will of your dependants: without this, very little can be done with them. But they

soon become attached to the master and his house if he treats them kindly, and if, whenever a stroke of good fortune befalls himself, he gives some advantage to them. This is, I think, the earliest hint of "sharing profits"! For the rest, Xenophon declares (for certainly it is he who speaks) that he has known good masters with bad servants, but never a bad master with good ones. It is disappointing to remark that, elsewhere, he writes unsympathetically of the "licence" accorded to Athenian slaves, who were never allowed to be struck, and who wore no distinctive class dress, so that "any one might take them for free citizens." Xenophon preferred the harsh practices in force at Sparta, which is only another proof that it is impossible to guess a man's public policy from his private disposition.

The dominant passion of Xenophon (if we take Ischomachus as his interpreter) was order. He grows lyrical in praise of the beautiful neatness of a man-of-war, and the passage might have been written to-day! This is the model which Ischomachus holds up to his wife for imitation. How admirable is a tidy linen-press or china-closet! Nay, how lovely are symmetrically arranged saucepans! Here the author has a suspicion that somebody will laugh, and perhaps he was laughing himself. A young wife wedded to such a martinet must have undergone various bad quarters of an hour; yet when she is really disturbed

at the loss of something that was not in its right place, her mentor made haste to discover that he was himself to blame for it.

The most serious reproof that the wife of Ischomachus ever received was on quite a different score. One morning she appeared with her girlish brow whitened with *lait d'iris*, rouge upon her cheeks, and a pair of high-heeled shoes on her feet. She was only following the fashion of the day. Athenian ladies, in spite of the seclusion in which they lived, had a perfect mania for cosmetics and gauds; they painted their necks and faces, darkened their eyebrows, and wore a profusion of jewels. Self-adornment was even encouraged by the law which punished any woman who was observed to be carelessly dressed. It has been thought that artificial embellishments became the vogue because real beauty, so common among the men of Athens, was rare among the women. Curiously enough, in modern Athens there are far more handsome men than women, although the most beautiful girls I ever saw were two sisters moving in Athenian society; but their family sprang from the isle of Paros.

When Ischomachus saw his wife disguised as above described, instead of telling her that she never looked so well (which was what she expected in her poor little heart), he began to ask the most irritating Socratic questions. How would she like it if he

brought her a quantity of pinchbeck silver and imitation jewelry? "Oh! do not say such dreadful things," she exclaims. "Could I love you as I do if you were to act like that?" When she sees the gist of his argument, which he pushes home with relentless logic, she takes the lesson in good part, and only asks what she is to do to really become better looking instead of only seeming so. As an alternative to cosmetics, Ischomachus proposes plenty of exercise, but alas! it is to be all indoors. Running about the house and offices to see that all is right, and lending a hand to kneading the bread, hanging out the clothes, and making the beds. This is the way to get a good complexion and a good appetite, and the maid-servants are encouraged when they see that their mistress is not above joining in their work. So ubiquitous a mistress would not be exactly popular below stairs in a modern house. Women, says Xenophon, are worth very little who are too fine to do anything but sit all day with crossed hands; which is true; still, it might have occurred even to him, that the routine proposed for the wife was cramped and dull compared with the vigorous outdoor life which he assigns to the husband. Ischomachus gets up early, and if he has no business to transact in the town, his groom brings round his horse and leads it before him to his farm (which, we may suppose, was about three miles out of Athens).

He walks the distance on foot for the sake of a "constitutional." When he gets to the place he watches the sowing or reaping or whatever rural task is going on, and afterwards he mounts his horse and rides away over hedges and ditches and hills and dales—the sort of country one would cover in war-time—never stopping at obstacles, but taking care not to lame the horse if he can help it. On his return the groom rubs down the horse and then takes it back to the town, carrying with him a basket of whatever farm produce is needed for the kitchen. Ischomachus walks home at a brisk pace and dines, neither too generously nor too meagrely, so that he feels well and active for the rest of the day.

An Italian proverb bids us praise the sea and keep to the land ; many poets have praised the country and lived in towns. But Xenophon was not a poet, and he meant what he said when he gave the palm to a country life. He was glad to say good-bye to towns for good and all. Athens could never have been the same to him after the death of Socrates, which was the first news that met him on his return from conducting the retreat of the Ten Thousand. Nor did he like the whole trend of Athenian policy. It is sad to feel that you have grown foreign in your own land. Later, he was banished from Athens, but even when the decree of banishment was revoked

and he might have gone back, he did not do so. His one desire was to live out his days on the beautiful estate which Sparta had presented to him, where he took up his abode with his wife and two little boys when he was still in the prime of life. It seems that he was once compelled by the tide of war to leave this estate, but there is reason to hope that he regained possession of it and was able to remain there till he died at the age of ninety. It was in this delightful retreat that he wrote nearly all his works, giving thus a practical illustration of one merit of country life not noted in his treatise — the leisure it affords for literary pursuits.

Scillas, the spot where Xenophon's property was situated, not only lay in one of the prettiest parts of Greece, but had the great advantage of being within a few miles of Olympia, where every five years all the most distinguished Hellenes assembled for the celebration of the Olympian games. On one occasion, amongst the visitors was Xenophon's old friend, the Warden of the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, to whom, years before, he had entrusted a certain sum of prize-money on the eve of a campaign ; if he died the money was to be offered to the goddess, if he lived it was to be restored to himself. This money the Warden brought with him, and with it Xenophon purchased some land near his own estate,

rich in streams, fish, and game, which he consecrated to Artemis. He raised an altar and had a statue made just like that at Ephesus, only smaller and of cypress wood instead of gold. Here, once a year, all the rich and poor, men and women, of the country round were invited to attend a festival, their wants being supplied "by the goddess"; barley-meal bread, meat from the sacrificed animals, wine, and sweetmeats forming the bill of fare, supplemented by wild boar, antelope, deer, and all sorts of game, the spoils of a great hunt organised by Xenophon's sons and his sporting neighbours some days in advance. Was there ever a happier *fête*, where each laid aside his sorrows, his heart-burnings, his little jealousies, his money-making, to rejoice in the sweet air gladdened by the sun and in the presence of an unseen Power that hears and guards!

For Xenophon the gods controlled the events of life and had knowledge of the past and future. They could easily be made our friends; they only asked of us offerings of their own gifts, a grateful heart, and no conscious concealment of the truth when we called upon them to witness our word. This was his religion and it served him both in bright hours and grey. He was performing a religious sacrifice when the message was brought to him that his son Gryllus had fallen. Xenophon took the garland from his head, but when the messenger

added "nobly," he put it on again, saying, "I knew that my son was mortal." Here we see the antique spirit at its best: self-restraint in adversity; preference of noble conduct to happy fortune; recognition that the gods rule wisely.

IV

THE LAST GREEK PEASANT

> We had not lost our balance then, nor grown
> Thought's slaves, and dead to every natural joy.
> *Empedocles on Etna.*

Failing further discoveries, we must attribute to the sweet singer of Syracuse an entirely new literary treatment of the peasant. Though the embryo of the idyll is to be found in the old pastoral stories of divine love affairs, as Theocritus himself implicitly states, yet he was the first to treat the countryman as a poetical personage who possesses inherent charm and interest. He touched his moral qualities rather with humour than with pathos, but he neglected none of the traits which make the young Southern peasant a beautiful feature in the landscape. He first understood his relations with Nature—a Nature not the sad nurse to all that die, but the bounteous mother of all that live. At the same time, he drew what he saw and not what he imagined. He did not dress up lettered poets as shepherds, or the

ladies of Versailles as shepherdesses. His rustics do not discuss politics or theology, the favourite themes of generations of succeeding swains. He idealised in the sense that he took what was attractive and left the rest; but what he took was true, not false —real, not artificial. It is the distinguishing trait of his charming poems that with their wild-flower fragrance they have a flavour of true rusticity. Many pastoral poets since have been elegant and some have been rustic, but the combination of the two characteristics never again has attained to quite the same perfection as that reached by the inventor of the idyll.

Theocritus appears to have owed some obligations to the poet Stesichorus, whose countrymen at Catania have thought to compensate for the loss of all his works by naming after him their finest street, which they are sure is also the finest street in the world. It is pretty certain that he owed more to folk-songs. The very form of his amoebaeic poems was taken from the toss-and-throw ditties sung at village *fêtes*, and it is still in use at country song-tournaments in Sicily. Livy believed it to be of Etruscan origin, but does not give his reason for doing so. The harvest-song of the Tenth Idyll is a real folk-song, and one which has a venerable origin, since the "songs of the god Lityerses" (at first elegies for the son of King Midas who was killed in single

combat with a mysterious stranger) were relics of the sacrifice to the growth-genius, and of the propitiatory rite at the seeming death of Nature. Elsewhere the story was told of a certain Bormus who left his reapers to fetch them water to drink and was never seen again. The theme of the song of Theocritus is less romantic, but its name tells its ancestry. Every kind of trade and occupation in Greece and her islands had a singing accompaniment: there were millstone songs, weaving songs, songs of nurses, songs of baking-women, songs of bathing-men, songs of labourers going to their work, songs of shepherds and goatherds. There is not the least doubt that such verse existed from the earliest times, and it is not fanciful to suppose that the songs of the shepherd and the goatherd were finer than the mere work-songs, many of which were only meant to secure regularity in the performance of a given action. The care of the flocks and herds afforded endless leisure in lovely surroundings: what could more invite inspiration? This poetry, which only asked for the "simple worship of a day," was found, already beautiful, by the poet who gave it immortality.

We know the scenery of the *Idylls*: it is that scenery of the pure South which comes upon the traveller one day as a sudden surprise after he thought that he knew all about Southern Nature.

Any one who has driven from Sorrento on the Bay of Naples to Positano on the Bay of Salerno will understand what is meant. At a particular point where the road, edged with grey-green aloes, reaches the crest of the mountain and where a new horizon opens before us, we forget the familiar loveliness of the Sorrento orange-groves in our wonder, our bewilderment, at this new vision; air and sea are incomparably clearer; rocks grow painted; if the vegetation is scarcer, it is also more vivid in hue; the sun seems to have taken off a veil. Wherever there is this nature the peasant of to-day will remind you of his prototype of over two thousand years ago. He has piped and sung and wooed and wed through the religious changes, the political convulsions, that have gone on around him as he did all these things when Theocritus took his likeness. They were no piping times of peace when the *Idylls* were written: Carthage and Rome made Sicily the battle-field between East and West. It was, however, one of the rare periods during which the Syracusan people were perfectly contented at home under the rule of a wise prince, and their domestic tranquillity may have contributed to produce the psychological moment for the birth of pastoral poetry.

An Idyll generally attributed to Theocritus, though the authorship has been, perhaps with reason,

contested — "Hercules the Lion-slayer, or the Wealth of Augeas"—gives a minute description of a *latifundium*, of which the counterpart could doubtless have been found in Sicily during the reign of Hieron. Part of the land is laid out in vast cornfields, some thrice, some four times ploughed; here the vineyards turn to the sun, there the orchards, while the rich pastures sloping towards the river suffice for countless sheep and heads of cattle. Yonder, sacred and undisturbed, is Apollo's grove of wild olives. The husbandmen are lodged in spacious dwellings. Hither often comes their master the king, accompanied by his son, for even princes deem that their house is safer if they look to it themselves. There is the usual incident of the dogs. The old husbandman drives them away, not by throwing stones, but by merely lifting them from the ground, and by reproving with his voice. "Strange," he muses, "what an intelligent creature is this which the gods have made to be with men; if only it knew how to distinguish whom to bark at from whom not, there would not be a beast to match it." To say the truth, Hercules in his lion-skin might look rather disreputable to even a wise dog, though his guide would be too polite to admit it. It was the lion-skin which afterwards caused a bull to run at him, whose powerful head he easily bent to earth, catching the horns, as the usage is with the Provençal peasants in

their sports, which date back to the time when Provence was Greek.

In the later Idyllists the wild-flowers of Theocritus become beautiful garden flowers. Bion and Moschus observed Nature truly, but they put themselves in it, not the real peasant. It was recognised that in spite of all the affinities between natural things and human moods, man in the highest sense stands apart from Nature; hence the poignant cry:

> Alas! when mallows perish in the gardens,
> The crisp-green parsley and the hardy anise,
> They live again, and grow another summer;
> But we, the great and strong, the sons of wisdom,
> When first we die, unknown in earthly hollow
> Sleep a long boundless sleep that hath no waking.
>
> ALFORD.

We find a last key to the feeling of Greek antiquity about country things in the precious collection called the *Anthology*. Here peasants become real again, but in the workmanship there is no rusticity; there is the utmost detachment from rusticity. These gems, so small and so perfect, could only have been made by people who were not only highly cultivated but also highly literary; people who weighed poetry entirely by quality; with whom four lines might create a reputation. They are the handiwork of men who, seated at the banquet of all that a great race had performed, arrived at the appreciation of the simple by the knowledge of the

complex. They indicate a "return to Nature," inspired less by the old joyous instinct than by the finely trained sense of artists. They are full of the love of a beautiful home. Leonidas of Tarentum, when he thought of his Italian birthland in glorious Athens, felt still that exile from it was worse than death. The Greeks of Magna Graecia, of Byzantium, of Alexandria, did not leave a national epic or a great tragedy; they had not the wild exuberance of growth that is needed for the first, nor did they breathe an air charged with dramatic electricity, such as that breathed by Sophocles or Shakespeare. We remember their civilisation by the roses of the *Anthology* as the Romans remembered the great city of Poseidonia by the roses of Paestum.

The position of that city, between the blue plain of the sea and the green plain of the land, betokens a race which did not hunger after heights, as did the Greeks of Greece. These Greeks of Italy, in spite of their one great star-gazer, were not constantly looking up, but they were constantly looking down — looking at the things at their feet. They lacked the mental virginity of Homer, who could speak sincerely of "godlike swineherds," and they were without the affectation which uses such terms insincerely. Nor did they see the peasant chiefly in the transfiguring season of his youthful love. He interested them most when he was old.

The charming story of the two old fishermen who discuss their dreams in the Twenty-first Idyll of Theocritus bears some resemblance to the poems of humble life in the *Anthology*; but while it is pervaded by a quiet laughter they are steeped in the *pur dictame* of tears. The *Anthology* is a true book of Pity and Death.

Here is the tomb of the shipwrecked sailor; there, that of the farm labourer, "a common Hades under sea and land." Eumelus, the fowler, who never kissed the hand of a stranger for food, made his living with bird-lime and sticks. Now, at ninety, he is dead and has left to his children bird-lime, birds, and sticks. One without a name will not complain because he is untended when dead; but it grieves him that the plough turns up his bones. The cows come, wretched, of their own accord to their shed from a mountain covered with snow. Alas! their master lies dead at the foot of an oak, struck by lightning. How forlorn that vision of the unled cows trooping alone down to the home that was desolate! The following by Antipater of Byzantium seems to me the most pathetic thing in all poetry: "A single heifer, and a sheep with wool like hair, was the wealth of Aristides; by these he kept off hunger from his door. But he failed in both. A wolf killed the sheep and labour pains the heifer, and the herd of poverty perished, and he, having

twisted a noose to his neck with the string that tied round his wallet, died piteously by his cabin where there was no lowing."

Agriculture is not a calling that leads, as has been supposed, to the possession of a quiet mind. Calligines, the countryman, consults a soothsayer about the coming summer and the harvest; he gets the answer: "If there be rain enough and not too much; if the plants be richer in fruitage than in leafage; if frost visit not the furrows nor hail the wheat; if fauns eat not up the crop—then, unless, after all, locusts descend on the land, a good harvest may be hoped for." There are as many "ifs" now, with a good many more thrown in. Fauns, dear creatures, are dead, along with the gods; but to-day that part of the prophecy would run, "If trespassing goats do not get at the crop"; and maybe the depredations were then also committed by goats, and not by the guileless fauns after all, for the goat is an ancient animal and wise, and quite capable of arranging in a manner that blame due to him should fall on the head of the innocent.

The pious ploughman sets apart certain "holy unsown enclosures" for Pan, and the old shepherd dedicates to him his crook now that he can work no more, though he is still able to play on his reed-pipe. Another old shepherd, Cleitagoras, laid to rest on the mountain-side, prays that the sheep may bleat

over him, while a shepherd, seated on a rough rock, gently pipes to them as they feed.[1] In this, which is by Leonidas of Tarentum, there is the radiance, not the gloom, of pathos; and that same radiance illuminates the epitaph from an unknown source, in which the dear Earth is asked to receive into her bosom old Amyntichus, who had laboured so long for her, planting olives and vines and corn, watered by well-cut channels, and herbs and fruit-trees. "Lie gently on his head and cover him with flowers in the spring." A thought is present here which must have struck whoever has watched a rustic funeral: the cultivator alone does not go into a strange bed. He has been ever at one with Nature, a complement to the earth he tilled, not a strange wandering being on it. He is going to be part of it now, and it seems sweet and hospitable, not cold and foreign.

[1] A traveller noticed in the new cemetery at Keropi, behind Hymettus, this epitaph, which is exactly in the spirit of the *Anthology*: "Here lies Georgios—after living seventy-five years—buried under his own wondrous oak." We think also of the folk-song of the dying Klepht who orders that his grave may be made "high and large,"

> "And to the right a lattice make a passage for the day,
> Where the swallow, bringing spring-tide,
> May dart about and play,
> And the nightingale, sweet singer,
> Tell the happy month of May."

I was always puzzled by this "high and large grave" till I saw the "chapel-tombs" dotted over the hill-sides in parts of Greece, and yet more frequently in Corsica. No human habitation is near, no sown field; only the asphodel and the fragrant herbs cropped by some wandering flock. I have actually seen a swallow going in and out of the window of one of these tombs.

But these exquisite poets did not only see man in the country; sad enough it would have seemed to them if only man were in it. They had the tender love for all creatures which some people think is a modern invention. What would be the *Anthology* without the cicada, "that never knows old age"? The gentle poets who could pause on their way to liberate a cricket from a spider's web sympathised even with beasts of prey. Who can find a prettier "lion-story" than that told by Leonidas of Alexandria? How, in a fearful night of storm and hail, a solitary lion went to the hut of some goatherds up in the mountains, his limbs already stiffened with cold. The goatherds crouched together, calling upon the gods, regardless of the goats; but the lion stayed through the storm and then went away, having done no harm to man or beast. Like peasants to-day in some shrine of the Madonna, so they hung upon an oak a picture of the event as an ex-voto thank-offering to "Zeus, who is in the hill-tops." But the honour is still with the lion.

What dog has had a more touching epitaph than the words inscribed by a Greek poet on the monument to his favourite: "Laugh not, you who pass, though this is the grave of a dog: I have been wept for"?

The hen which cradled her nurslings under her

wings till she was frozen to death, as still she tried to protect them from the wintry snow; the young cow which, while ploughing, looks anxiously back at the calf that follows her along the furrows—are they not pitiful and gracious images? It is clear that some of the writers felt a scruple about animal sacrifices. Sometimes that scruple takes a pious form, as when Zeus "the Ethereal" is beseeched to spare the bull, "the ploughing animal," that bellows a suppliant at his altar; elsewhere it reveals a nascent scepticism. Hercules needs a sheep every day to keep away the wolves: does it much matter to the sheep if it be eaten by wolves or sacrificed to Hercules? Hermes is praised for being satisfied with offerings of milk and honey. Addaeus of Macedon made immortal the husbandman Alcon, who, when his ox was worn out by the furrow, forbore to lead it to the slaughtering-knife through respect for its labours, but turned it into a meadow of deep grass where it showed its content by lowing for its freedom from the plough. There are in Crete many Alcons still whom nothing will induce to kill their four-footed fellow-workers when they are weak with age.

However unjustly poets are suspected of painting fancy portraits, so it is only fair to the Greek countryman—before we leave him—to see how he looks in the cold light of prose. Happily the task is both easy and agreeable; Dion Chrysostom has

given us the very thing we want in the plain, unvarnished tale of "The Euboean Hunter," which he declares to be "all true." For the sake of the story we must take him at his word; in a certain sense, doubtless, it is truer than truth—what is told of an individual belongs to a class. This heightens its value as a document. He describes an adventure which may be supposed to have happened about the end of the first century A.D. Overtaken by a storm the fishermen on whose boat the narrator had embarked, were obliged to take refuge on the wild coast of Euboea. The fishermen went to join others of their trade, while Dion Chrysostom walked along the lonely shore in the hopes of seeing some passing ship which would take him up. He had been a long time employed in this manner when he suddenly saw at his feet a stag which had thrown itself down from the cliff; the waves beat against its still breathing body. Then he thought he could distinguish the barking of dogs, but the noise of the waves prevented him from hearing distinctly. Nevertheless he scrambled up the steep bank in the direction from which the sounds came, and before long he saw the dogs running to and fro in search of the stag that had disappeared. At the same time, he saw a man with a long beard and hair which, thrown back from his forehead, fell gracefully on his shoulders. His dress and semblance betokened a hunter. "Stranger,"

asked the man, "have you seen a fugitive stag?" Dion Chrysostom showed him the place where the creature lay and helped him to drag it out of the water. Then followed an invitation to pass the night in the hunter's dwelling, not far away. There was no chance of embarking that day, it would be sheer madness; the storm showed no signs of abating; and the misty mountain-tops announced the continuance of foul weather. When the hunter had heard how the stranger came to be there, he bade him thank the gods that he was alive; there was not such a dangerous spot on all the coast; it was a veritable sailor's grave. "You look like a townsman," he added; "you are so thin one would think that you must have something the matter with you"—a personal and hardly complimentary remark characteristic of the peasant!

Dion Chrysostom followed him willingly. He had not much to fear, for he had nothing but an old cloak: poverty is sacred and no one touches the destitute. As they walked towards the dwelling-place, the hunter told his new acquaintance who were the folk with whom he was going to lodge. They were only two, himself and his brother, with their respective families. Their fathers had been free citizens though poor; they kept the oxen of a rich proprietor whose wealth had been his misfortune; it was even said that he was killed by order of the

king because he was too rich—at any rate, as soon as he was dead his goods were confiscated by the State, the herds and flocks with the rest. The ox-herds, their occupation gone, lingered in the mountain valley where the cattle were led in summer, and where they were grazing at the time of the catastrophe. It was a charming place, with good water. Here the two men decided to live on, supporting themselves chiefly by hunting, which they were able to pursue because two of the dogs that had gone with the sheep and cattle when they were driven down the mountain, came back to their old masters. At first they were unused to the chase, but by careful training they became capital hunting-dogs, and from pursuing only wolves or suspicious-looking men, they learnt to follow every sort of game. One point in the training was to feed them on flesh instead of on bread.

By and by the old people died, but not before each had given his daughter in marriage to the son of the other. These, with their children, were the present occupiers of the huts to which Dion was conducted.

One of the brothers had never been to the town ; the other went there once with his father when they were still the rich man's servants, and once on a far more eventful occasion, the exciting incidents of which he proceeds to relate to his guest.

It happened that their peace was disturbed by an

unbidden visitor, who was no more or less than a tax-collector! He demanded money, to which they replied that they had none, or they would have placed it at his service; they pressed on him two fine deer-skins, which he took, but insisted that one of them should go back with him to the town. So the hunter saw again what he had seen as a child: many big houses, a wall with towers, many ships in the harbour. What struck him most were the crowds and the noise—it was enough to deafen you. The tax-collector took him before the magistrates, and said, laughing, "Here is the man you sent me to find; he has nothing in the world but a hut and an empty sheepfold." The magistrates did not answer; they were about to go to the theatre, and the hunter went with them. There he found a worse crowd than all the rest, which was behaving in what he thought a most extraordinary manner; it did nothing but scream applause or disapproval. Some of the speakers made long speeches, some only spoke a few words, some were howled down as soon as they opened their lips. At last there was silence, and the hunter was led before the assembly.

Then a man whom he had never seen sprang to his feet and pointed to him "as one of the wretches who have stolen the lands of the Republic; feeding their flocks, planting vineyards, keeping slaves, oxen" —in short, making thousands a year and not paying

one penny of taxes! Of course the impostor dressed up to look poor, but let no one be deceived. And there was something more to say; these knaves, these scoundrels, were also wreckers who lighted beacons on the cliffs to lure mariners to their doom! At this diatribe the populace became so much excited that the hunter almost feared for his life. However, another citizen got up and said that in his opinion the cultivation of waste lands was a merit rather than a crime. A violent wrangle followed between the first and second speakers, and then the hunter was called upon to make his defence.

He said simply that all the magnificent possessions mentioned by his accuser were purely imaginary; they had none of them, but what they had sufficed for their simple wants. If they could give anything that the State would like to have, it might take it and welcome. Somebody asked, "What can you give?" "Four splendid deer-skins," was the answer, which provoked shouts of laughter. There were a few other skins of bear and goat, but they were too common to offer; there were also some excellent smoked hams and dried quarters of venison, and a few bushels of beans and barley. Mockery and scorn met this inventory, even after the addition of eight goats, a lame cow and her pretty calf, two hunting-knives, a few farm tools, two clean and tidy huts with a wife and children in each. The hunter

speaks calmly and respectfully; only at the end, when he refutes the charge of their being a nest of wreckers, is he roused to indignation.

Then some one else gets up whom he fears to be a fresh enemy, but this new orator states that he now plainly recognises in the hunter the very man who rescued himself and his father three years before, when they were shipwrecked on that terrible coast, and at the point of death with hunger and cold. He took them to his hut and warmed and fed them, and his wife rubbed their stiffened limbs with grease as there was no oil. The poor folks kept them for three days, giving them two fine deer-skins at parting, and as if all this were not enough, the man who stood there at the bar of the assembly took off his daughter's covering to wrap round the speaker, who was still suffering from exposure, while the young girl clad herself in some poor rags, without a murmur. After the gods, it was to him that he owed his own and his father's life.

This speech produced an indescribable effect: the assembly grew frantic with enthusiasm. The moment would have been solemn if the hunter had not gone across to his former guest and kissed him and his father, who stood near him, on their faces. At this the public laughed so much that the good man understood that "in town people do not kiss on the face." Gravity having been restored, it was

decided to grant the men undisturbed occupation on the land around their huts, and to confer a tunic and a mantle on the hunter "who had stripped his own daughter to cover a citizen's nakedness," as well as a hundred drachmae for his household needs, which his first defender volunteered to pay out of his own purse. But the hunter would not take the money, nor did he wish to take the tunic and the mantle, though he ended by accepting them as they were speedily procured and thrown over him. He was with difficulty persuaded not to put his deer-skin on the top of the other garments.

Such was the tale of the hunter. Dion Chrysostom adds to it a little idyll which he describes himself as having witnessed while he was the hunter's guest. A handsome youth comes in with a hare which he presents with a kiss to his pretty cousin, the hunter's younger daughter. The Philosopher understands the situation at a glance, and determines to try to do the young people a good turn. Having elicited what he had already guessed—that youth and maiden were engaged to be married—he asks, Why put off the happy day? After a few idle objections, it is confessed that there is no real reason for delay except that they have neglected to prepare the victim which must be offered to the gods on the occasion of a marriage. "Oh, if that's all," cries a small boy, "the victim has been ready for ever so long; it is just

out there, behind the hut." The children all run off and come back cutting capers round a fat little pig, which the young man had bought in the village with the skin of a baby wild boar. They had been feeding it up for months, and the only person who knew nothing about the matter was the head of the house, who, poor man, had racked his brains to account for most mysterious gruntings. He takes the deception good-humouredly, and two days later the simple marriage rites are performed. The air is still and all the stars have come back into the sky. How different, says the story-teller, were these rustic nuptials from the sordid marriages of the rich, with their contracts and signatures and bargains and duplicities, and the bickerings and quarrels that often arose even on the wedding-day!

V

NATURE IN THE EARLIER ROMAN POETS

Sentiment is the fairy moss, the silvery lichen, which grows on the old walls—not unfrequently on the tombstone—of interest. One cannot help feeling respect for the unflinching directness of the people that raised an altar to the god Stercutus. Those who laid the foundations of Rome's greatness grasped the fact that Italy is an agricultural country, and that if you look to the crops, the heroes will take care of themselves. Hence the paramount importance and dignity ascribed to agricultural pursuits in the early days of the Republic, and the favour and support accorded to the cultivator of the soil. Whoever knows anything of Italian agriculture must have been struck by the care with which the Roman laws of the old period provided against the very troubles which beset the modern land-owner.

He will certainly have personal experience of the

mischief done by (1) *ladri campestri*, the petty thieves who live by small but constantly repeated depredations; (2) intentional damage in harvest-field or vineyard; (3) loss caused by goats and other animals which pasture in the lanes and acquire great agility in jumping hedges. The shepherds who lead their flocks from the plains to the mountains in spring and from the mountains to the plains in autumn, manage to maintain them for several weeks in each season almost without cost. It is done partly on the wayside grass, but this does not suffice. There are peasants, too, who keep two or three animals when their plot will only support one—for the rest they must trust to heaven. I have seen a sheep trained to take a hedge like a hunter. (4) Encroachments of neighbouring proprietors on any spot not often visited by the owner. The Roman law looked to all these cases. He who wilfully injured another's crops, or cut them down during the night, was punished with crucifixion, or, if he were a minor, he was consigned to the injured proprietor to work as a slave till the loss should be recuperated. A person who intentionally set fire to the fields or to the grain was burnt alive; if he did it by accident he was flogged. The theft of agricultural implements was punished with death. You had a right to kill any one who removed your landmark. Monstrous as some of these penalties were, the spirit

which ran through such legislation was more consonant with rural prosperity than that which inspires the tender-hearted Italian juries who practically refuse to convict under any of the above heads because the delinquent is a *povero diavolo*, and what can you expect?

Besides the summary method placed in the hands of the proprietor of defending his boundaries, these were further protected by the god Terminus, whose temple was on the Tarpeian rock and who was represented without arms or legs because he never moved. When it was proposed to build a temple to Jupiter on the Tarpeian rock, the other gods, who had their seat there, gracefully made way, but Terminus refused to stir. The country people on his annual festival covered their boundary stones with flowers and sacrificed to the god.

Wise, and in the highest degree civilised, were the Roman laws which promoted the opening of markets and fairs, and prohibited any assembly that might interfere with farmers on market-days; which allowed liberty to the grower to get the highest price he could and discouraged monopolies; which kept the public roads both safe and in excellent condition, thus facilitating the transport of produce.

Then came the too easy acquisition of wealth, the importation of Egyptian corn, the multiplication of slave-labour, the increase of large holdings and the

consequent conversion of much arable land into pasture. No attempt can be made here to gauge the effects of these changes on the Italian peasantry. We often read of the Italian peasant class being swept away, but if this happened, it showed a remarkable faculty for resuscitation. Perhaps a love of eccentricity made De Quincey argue that, "there was not one ploughman the less at the end than at the beginning," but his paradox may not be farther from the truth than the theory of wholesale extirpation. Enough peasants were left to be the chief transmitters of the old Italian blood which was to tincture all the northern deluges, and so to bear out Virgil's prophecy that the name of Italy would survive every conquest, and that, by a fated law, only those invaders came to stay who merged their own language and character in the native speech and birth-stamp of the people of the land.

Through all changes the idea remained, the idea of the paramount importance and dignity of agriculture. The figure of the hero who, after saving his country, returned to till his fields, had taken hold of the Roman mind as the type of true virtue, and the quality of a nation's ideals is as important as the quality of its realities. When Trajan made it a law that those who aspired to occupy public office must possess a third of their substance in land, he was wisely yielding to the influence of one of

the continually recurring waves of popular opinion in favour of husbandry. However much the agriculturist was sacrificed, first to faction and then to despotism, this opinion never really altered. The taste for country things, of which all the Roman poets were in some degree interpreters, was built upon the national conviction of a national necessity.

The account given by Lucretius of the first steps of humanity was as good science as he could make it. No line, no word is thrown in for the sake of poetic effect ; though the story is avowedly constructed by guesswork, the guesses are based on carefully weighed probabilities.

The type of his primitive man and woman is to be looked for, not among contemporary savages (who may have been descending all the while that we have been ascending), but among our fellow-creatures, the beasts of the field. Each animal in its natural state follows the law which is fitted to perpetuate its species. It is not the enemy of its kind ; it has its own method of keeping its person and its nest or lair clean ; the males do not ill-treat the females ; parents bring up their offspring even at a great sacrifice to themselves ; those species in which the male is obliged to find food for the female after the birth of the young ones are mostly monogamous, and as long as the contract lasts it is

faithfully observed. In the time of courting every creature seeks to be admired by its mate. Here are the materials which Lucretius used.

If, he says, the human race in its infancy had not, as a rule, respected the weak and watched over the woman and the child, it would very soon have come to an end. He describes the discovery of language much in the same way as a biologist of the present day would do; all creatures make different noises under different circumstances; the Molossian dogs make one sound when they growl with fury, another when they bark in company, another when they howl in lonely buildings, a fourth when they shrink from a blow, a fifth when they tenderly lick and fondle their whelps, pretending to snap at them or swallow them up, and whining in a low, soothing note. Man, having a voice and tongue well adapted to language, soon developed a rude form of articulate speech. Then his education progressed rapidly. The pretty, winning ways of children were what first softened and civilised the wild human heart. Men learnt the uses of fire, of which a flash of lightning or the friction of dead branches was the origin; stone weapons were invented and animals were tamed; it occurred to one man to clothe himself in a skin, not, alas! to his advantage, for his fellows, filled with envy, set upon him and killed him, and in the struggle the skin was spoilt and

rendered useless to any one. So, perhaps, began human strife! Originally beauty and strength were what gave the chiefship, but, by and by, wealth began to interfere with that natural selection. Man applied himself to the vast undertaking of cultivating the earth: the forests retreated up the mountains; vineyards and olive groves and cornfields appeared in the plains and valleys. The great invention of how to work in wool substituted a better sort of dress for skins. At first men, doubtless, spun as well as delved, "since the male sex are far superior in art and ingenuity in whatever they turn their hand to," but the sturdy labourers jeered at their stay-at-home brothers, and called them out to help them in the fields: thus it was that women became spinsters.

About this time Lucretius placed his Golden Age, in which no privileged beings lead an impossible life, but real rustics taste the joys of simplicity. Here the real is beautiful, but it does not cease to be the real; there is as much reality in an arum lily as in a toadstool. In fine weather, when the young men had satisfied their hunger, they laughed and jested under the trees, dancing with stiff, awkward steps and crowning their heads with flowers and leaves. Then they sang, imitating the liquid voices of birds, and they found the way to make music on a reed. The sweet, plaintive notes of the pipe were heard

through all the pathless woods and in secret haunts and divine resting-places.

This generation, which had no empty cares nor emptier ambitions, could be called happy, if men could ever be called so. But of all writers Lucretius was most conscious of the elemental world-pain which none can escape. No day passes into night, no night passes into day, that does not hear the cries of the new-born infant mixing with the wails of the mourners by their dead. Nor is man alone in his sorrow; while the calf bleeds before some lovely temple, the mother, vainly seeking her child, wanders hither and thither through the wood, leaving the print of her hoofs upon the moist ground. Then she stands still and fills the air with her laments, and then hurriedly she returns to the stable to see if by chance it is not there. Nor do fresh pastures, nor the sight of other calves console her, for she nowhere beholds the loved form.

With the exception of Dante no poet has the restrained descriptive power of Lucretius, or, perhaps, in the same degree, the art of choosing suggestive words. A few lines bring a natural scene or a person before our eyes so forcibly that no detail seems to be wanting. His similes produce the illusion of making a direct appeal to our eyes. Take, for instance, that of the flock of grazing sheep and frisking lambs scattered over the down "which

in the distance appears to be only a whiteness on a green hill." Or take the portrait of the old countryman whom we all have met :

> And now, shaking his head, the aged peasant laments with a sigh that the toil of his hands has often come to nought, and as he compares the present with the past time, he extols the fortune of his father and harps on this theme, how the good old race, full of piety, bore the burden of their life very easily within narrow bounds, when the portion of land for each man was far less than now.—SELLAR.

When we speak of Nature we are generally thinking of the desert, the Alps, the ocean, the prairie—Nature without man. This is what was rarely thought of by the poet of antiquity. Lucretius, almost alone, contemplated Nature as detached from man, of whose powerlessness he had a sense which was more Eastern than European. He allowed, indeed, that a human being might rise to a moral and intellectual grandeur that exceeded all the magnificence and the power of external Nature. This great admission, clothed in words of singular solemnity, is contained in the passage in which he says that, rich and beautiful as is the land of Sicily, there is nothing in it so sacred, wonderful, and beloved as its philosopher—his master, Empedocles. But men in the aggregate, what were they ? Specks, atoms. Was it surprising that they should have been seized with fear and trembling in presence of

the shining firmament, the spiral lightning, the storm at sea, the earthquake; or that such sights should have inspired them with the idea of the gods? So these frightened children fell on their faces and turned their veiled heads towards a stone; useless rites, idle actions, devoid of real piety, since real piety consists in viewing all things with a serene mind.

Man's business was to cheerfully accept his position as an atom. Even the awe which filled Kant when he looked at the starry sky would have been held by Lucretius to be a relic of superstition. He meant his teaching to console; life, he argued, which is full of so many inevitable ills, would be made more endurable were supernatural terrors away; but men preferred to keep their fears sooner than to lose their hopes. His conception of Nature as a living power, a sole energy informing the infinitely various manifestations of matter and spirit, was like some great mountain wall rising thousands of feet above us—grand but unfriendly. He excluded from it the spiritual passion which vitalised the later monism. He would have excluded emotion from the universe, but he could not keep it out of his own heart—a heart full of human kindness, sensitive affections, power of sympathy. The clashing of such a temperament with the coldest and clearest intellect that ever man possessed, was enough to work madness in the

brain without the help of the legendary love-philtre. The total impression left by *De rerum natura* is that of the earth as a stepmother who grudges the bread which, with pain and grief and by the sweat of his brow, the husbandman seeks to extract from her.

The poetry of the Ego, lyrical poetry in its modern sense, sprang into life full-grown with Catullus. Even his allusions to Nature are personal ; they are to Nature in its relation with his own state, his own feelings, as when he likens his ill-requited love to a wild flower which has fallen on the verge of the meadow after it has been touched by the passing ploughshare. Anacreon had written love-songs, and some poets of the *Anthology* had touched intimate chords that awaken perennial responses, but Catullus was the first to fling himself *tout entier* into his poetry for better, for worse ; sometimes supremely for better, sometimes very much for worse. Favoured by an age when republican austerity had disappeared in licence, and by the toleration of a forgiving Caesar, he made poetry the medium of his loves, passions, friendships, joys, griefs, hates, spites ; the impartial mouthpiece of what was highest and lowest in him. He was the first to be utterly reckless in his choice of subjects ; one thing was as good as another as long as it moved him. He looked on poetry as a vent, not as a profession or as a road to fame. It is impossible not to suppose that most of

his poems were improvisations. Could he have made his individual intensity general, he might have been the great tragic dramatist whom Rome never produced—as one may guess from the terrible *Atys*. He remained, instead, a poetical idler, whose small amount of recorded work, almost a miracle (the chance survival of a single copy) has preserved to sure immortality.

He was the first, if not to feel, at all events to express, the modern "wander madness," the longing for travel for its own sake, the flutter of anticipation in starting for new scenes and far-off "illustrious cities." His fleet pinnace scoured the seas like the yacht of a modern millionaire, to end its days, at last, in the clear waters of the lovely lake to which its master returned with the joy in home-coming which stay-at-homes can never know, and which is the sweet, unmerited reward of faithlessness. Here, wedged in between the moist and leafy landscapes of northern Italy, he found an enhanced memory of the scenes he had left—the Sea of Marmara, the Isles of Greece. The same colour of the arid earth; the same silver olives, the same radiant light and sun, with waters still more translucently blue than those of southern seas. It is easy to imagine that the "all-but-island Sirmio" had been the Elysium of his childhood, his first glimpse of a southern fairyland, so that the charm of earliest associations combined

with the delightful feeling of possession in rendering it so dear to him. He had gone there as a boy with that brother whose loss he was one day to mourn in helpless sorrow among the olives under which they both had played. The poem to Sirmio is the most ideally perfect of all "poems of places," and the truest. Two thousand years are annihilated by Catullus's beautiful lines; they have the eternal novelty of Nature herself. The blue lake of Garda laughs in its innumerable ripples as it laughed with the household of the young poet in joy at his return. Those who have heard the wavelets lap the stones of Sirmione with a musical rhythm will be always tempted to interpret the much-disputed epithet of "Lydian" in the sense of "softly sweet in Lydian measures"—the sense of "Lydian hymns," "Lydian harmonies." It would seem that Tennyson so interpreted it. Certainly, Lydian was a term more commonly applied to music than to anything else. But among scholars "golden" (from the golden stream of Lydia) has more advocates. In a picturesque sense this would not be ill-adapted. Sirmione is the one spot from which the lake does look, at times, actually golden, because it there takes the sunset rays when the sun is close to the horizon; in the higher, mountain-girt regions "argentine"—the *gran' tazza argentea* of Carducci—suits it better. For the theory that Lydian means "Etruscan" (the

Etruscans believing themselves to have come from Lydia) there is this to be said : unquestionably there were Etruscan colonies on the lake ; the name of the village of Toscolano bears living witness to the fact and there are other proofs. Scaliger did not know of these colonies though his father was born on the lake of Garda and should have heard of Toscolano. The great Latinist ridiculed the idea of the "Tuscan lake," and made a suggestion of a clerical error in which many have followed him. But the waters will remain "Lydian" to the end !

> Of all peninsulas, Sirmio, and of islands,
> Loved gem ! those either placed in still lake waters,
> Or lashed each side by Neptune's mighty billows,
> How gladly, how delightfully I hail thee !
> From Thynia and Bithynian plains scarce deeming
> I can have 'scaped, and reach thee now securely.
> Oh, what so blest, as to be freed from troubles
> When the mind lays aside its load, and wearied
> Of foreign wanderings, we regain our homestead
> And rest upon the couch so long desired ;
> This, this, the full reward of all my labours.
> Hail, pleasant Sirmio, kindly greet thy master ;
> Rejoice ye, too, calm lake, glad Lydian water,
> Laugh, and let all the household join the laughter.

Between the Tiburtine and Sabine territories, not far from Rome, Catullus had another estate, to which he addressed some merry verses that show him in what was certainly his normal mood—gay and paradoxical, with a stinging tongue which he took no pains to control. For some reason he wished

the farm to be known as "Tiburtine," and it made him very angry to hear it called "Sabine." The occasion of the verses was a visit he paid to it when, as he asserts, he had been given a bad cold by having to listen to the terrible composition of an acquaintance named Sextius. Coughing and sneezing, he fled to his villa, doctored himself with nettle and basil, and was soon expressing his best thanks to the "Tiburtine farm" for making him well.

The two pretty poems to "The Garden God," attributed to Catullus, though there exists no proof that he wrote them, would hand down to us, were other record wanting, the memory of an essentially popular cultus which was never looked upon by educated people otherwise than as a harmless superstition. When Venus caused Priapus to be exposed in the mountains, ashamed of being known as the mother of such a fright, she closed the doors of heaven upon him beyond recall. He never became a proper orthodox god. Shepherds, however, were reported to have saved his life, and peasants set up his altars. At one time his worship seems to have been accompanied by gross licence, but it had lost this character among the Roman husbandmen of the Republic. It retained indeed a crude symbolism. The lore of peasants is not all fit for ears polite, as would be remarked if everything that folk-lorists collect were published. The peasant tongue does

not know—how should it know?—the virtue of reticence. But the uppermost feeling of the Roman ploughman for his garden god was a sympathy of the poor of the earth for the poor of heaven. Some sorry saints have got into the calendar by a similar mental process.

The Priapus of the Catullian poems becomes likeable from his faithful care of the cot in the marshes, thatched with rushes, where the poor owners, the father and the son, thrive so well because of their piety towards their protecting fetich, whom they privately treat just as if he were a real god. Besides the little offerings of the earliest spring flowers, of green unripe wheat ears, yellow violets, pale gourds, fragrant apples, and purple grapes, a goat ("but say nothing about it") has sometimes stained its altar with his blood, notwithstanding the risk of offending the higher deities to whom the living sacrifice was reserved. Grateful for which attentions the garden god bids the boys be off to pilfer the rich neighbour, obligingly adding, "This path will lead you to his grounds."

It is possible that one other element entered into the cultus of Priapus: some grain of the deep-rooted tendency to associate monstrosity with divinity, which seems to have begun with the syllogism—the monstrous is abnormal, the divine is abnormal, therefore the monstrous is the divine. Greece saved

the Western world from that awful heresy by formulating the great truth at the basis of all truth, that the divine is normal, is beauty, is law. But the natural man inclines to backsliding, and not even to this day in the regions that have inherited the light of Greece is the contrary opinion wholly dead.

VI

A PROSE SOURCE OF THE *GEORGICS*

VARRO was the Admirable Crichton of the Romans. He was easily first in the knowledge of all arts, all sciences; music, painting, the stage, had no more acute critic; a profound student of history and language, he had the passion for antiquity of a scholar of the Cinque Cento—since "antiquity" already existed with all its sweet, real, and unreal pleasures. He also had the serious curiosity about astrology and kindred subjects which became so general among the men of the Renaissance. Besides all this, he was theologian-in-chief of the old religion, and of his many lost works the sixteen volumes in which he treated mythical, philosophical, and popular theology are those which we must most deplore. They would have supplied a want, felt by every student, by furnishing a clear exposition of the educated Roman's attitude towards the faith of his fathers. Their value to us would have been the greater because they were written in an outspoken

age ; not the time of Augustus, when you were not respectable unless you were orthodox, but the time of *De rerum natura* and the *Atys*. Varro was born one hundred and sixteen years before Christ, and lived to ninety. He dedicated his great theological work to Julius Caesar.

He was skilled in navigation and tried in war ; the fact that he was the first to leap on board the enemy's ship when conducting a naval expedition won him a rostral crown. He was past eighty when he wrote the only one of his books that has come down to us intact, the elaborate treatise *De re rustica*, which probably suggested to Virgil the idea of writing the *Georgics*. A small portion of a work on the Latin language is the only other surviving specimen of Varro's contributions to literature, a poor salvage out of nearer seven than six hundred volumes of prose and verse !

His enormous literary activity is partly explained by his early retirement from public affairs, in which, as a young man, he made an important start, but unfortunately not on the winning side. A partisan of Pompey, he bowed to the inevitable by rendering submission to Caesar, but henceforth his public career was closed. Caesar appreciated his talents and was disposed to be friendly to him ; one day, however, Antony took a fancy to some of Varro's property and managed to have it confiscated in his own favour by

reviving the memory of his connection with Pompey. The object having been obtained, Varro was amnestied, and still rich, he enjoyed a happy and diligent old age, cheered by a wife who was much younger than himself, and, while Cicero lived, by his intimate friendship.

For his wife, whose name was Fundania, he undertook to put his long experience in agricultural matters into a permanent form. She desired to cultivate a recently acquired estate on the most scientific principles, and as Varro could not count on remaining for many years at her side, he wrote this treatise so that when he came to die she might still have a guide. Though the Roman "new woman" was making rapid progress and the wall between the proper and the improper was getting daily thinner, Fundania was probably by no means a rare instance of a matron who, besides attending scrupulously to her household duties, was able to manage her own property down to the minutest details. The normal slips out of the ken of posterity because it is the normal. There is not the least doubt that the Lesbias in every age were far less numerous than the Fundanias. Italian married women have been called indolent and frivolous, but a great many, like Fundania, themselves administer the land which came to them as their dowry. The husband advises, perhaps, but he does not interfere, and such land is generally in good order.

By way of opening, Varro rather frigidly invokes the gods who preside over agriculture, Jupiter and Tellus, the sun and moon, Ceres and Bacchus, Robigus and Flora, Minerva who gave the olive, and Venus who cares for gardens, Lympha who bestows the heavenly rain, and Bona Eventu, without whom nothing prospers. He then goes on to draw up a list of those authors, "Greek and our own," whose works his wife may study with advantage for light on any points which by chance he forgets to mention. Even Fundania, enthusiastic agriculturist as we know her to have been, and good Greek scholar as she doubtless was, must have looked with some terror at the list of Greek authorities. For the Romans, as for the men of Dante's time, the Greeks were essentially *color che sanno*, not in philosophy alone, but in physical science. The Greek books recommended to Fundania were forty-seven. Xenophon's work we possess, but nearly all this vast library has perished; so also has the great work in seventy-eight books of the Carthaginian Magos, which was considered of such value that it was translated into Latin by decree of the Senate. The Carthaginians were excellent farmers, and during their long dominion in Sardinia they made that island the granary of Carthage, an end obtained, however, by imported slave-labour, which was the secret, more often than people are inclined to admit, of the

wonderful productiveness in ancient times of lands now sterile.

Varro does not go on, as he promised, to enumerate the Latin authors ; perhaps the passage in which he did so is lost, or he thought it sufficient to refer to them separately, here and there, in the course of his treatise. Columella, whose work on agriculture became almost as famous as Varro's own, and who had the courage to write a poem intended to fill the gap left by Virgil on gardening, belongs to a much later date. In Varro's time the best Roman writers on farming were the two Sasernas and the elder Cato, whose essay, *De re rustica*, was regarded with unbounded respect. The writer had passed into an ideal region in which he held all the higher a place because the world had moved so far and fast away from him. Virgil's debt to Cato has been frequently pointed out, while his obligations to Varro were ignored. The most esteemed of contemporary model farmers was an accomplished Roman aristocrat of the name of Scrofa, to whom Varro pays many compliments, though he makes some fun of his infelicitous patronymic, still perpetuated in the family of the Marquis Scrofa of Florence.

Varro's treatise is written in the form of conversations, and begins not without a certain dramatic effectiveness. He was invited, he says, by the Guardian of the Temple of Tellus to keep the feast

of seed-sowing, but on reaching the place he found that his host had been called away on public business. Several of his friends were there already waiting, and when Varro arrived they were engaged in contemplating the map of Italy which was painted on the wall. As they gaze at the map, the friends, who were all persons well known to Roman society, speak in praise of their fruitful mother-country. If the eulogy is less glowing than Virgil's, it is not less convinced. What country in the world has so favourable a geographical position? ("L'Italie paraît faite pour conquérir l'univers," wrote Gibbon in his French journal.) The north is more healthy and more fertile than the south (the "South" here standing for Asia, and the "North" for Europe); only you must not be too far north or you get to the Arctic pole, where there is a six months' night and a sea covered with ice. Varro's father-in-law, Fundanius, observes that as even in Italy, where night and day last so short a time, he is obliged in summer to take a siesta at noon, what would one do in a place where the nights and days each lasted six months? After this sally, there is more praise of Italy. What useful product is there which it does not produce? Is it less rich in vines than Phrygia, to which Homer gave the name of "vine-bearing," or less abounding in corn than Argos, which he called "wheat-bearing"? What wine approaches

that of Falerno? What oil equals the oil of Venafro? Where are there harvests like those of Campania and Apulia? Do not the fruit-trees which cover Italy make it seem one immense orchard? If you travel through the world, do you find a country in better cultivation?

Other friends come, and among them the above-mentioned Scrofa. Once or twice some one says, "I am afraid the Guardian of the Temple will return before we have done talking." The conversation flows on the more naturally because it is not eloquent; one thing leads to another, and off and on it is enlivened by a mild joke. It is surprising that the habit of writing in dialogue did not sooner develop into the novel. Varro gives each of his personages little distinctive marks by which you may know him, and by which, no doubt, he was recognised by those who did know him.

Leaving generalities, he puts forth the opinion that a splendidly cultivated estate (such as the one owned by Scrofa on the Via Sacra) is a far pleasanter sight than a profusely decorated house, and that when you go into the country you look for well-filled barns and not for the picture-galleries of Lucullus. A discussion follows as to whether the scope of agriculture is utility or pleasure, and whether in a treatise on farming, tillage alone should be considered, or flocks and herds as well. It is argued rather

speciously that stock-raising is only an accessory and sometimes even injurious, as in the case of goats, which injure vines and olives. Hence the sacrifice of a goat to Bacchus, as he was supposed to see with pleasure its destruction, but never to Minerva, as her antipathy for it was so great that she disliked to see it at all. A goat was sacrificed only once a year at Athens from the fear that it might injure the wild olive which had taken root of itself within the precincts of the Acropolis. Varro remarks that authors introduce all sorts of extraneous matter into their works on agriculture. The Sasernas, both father and son, interpret the term so freely that they class making pottery or working a silver mine under the head of Agriculture, because it has to do with the *agro*—the soil. One of the speakers interposes, "You laugh at the Sasernas out of envy, picking out their weak points instead of appreciating the many good parts of their books." But bad examples are infectious, and they all begin to recall the miscellaneous information garnered by these two respectable authorities. This is one item: "To remove superfluous hair: boil a yellow frog in water till the liquid is reduced to two-thirds; then rub the skin with it." "As for me," says Varro, "I have found a point which I am all the more ready to quote because it concerns the health of Fundanius, for I often see him knitting his brows from twinges in his toes." "Speak out directly," cried Fundanius; "I

would much rather hear how to cure my corns than how to plant a pear orchard." Here is the prescription: "When the pain is felt, we can cure the person who feels it, provided that at that moment he is thinking of us." ("Well, I am thinking hard of you; cure me!" says Fundanius.) The magic-worker must repeat twice nine times:

> Terra pestem teneto,
> Salvus hic maneto
> (Earth take the pain,
> Let health remain)

—one of those Roman popular jingles which prove that there were rhymed folk-songs before rhyme was admitted into literature. At the same time the operator must touch the earth and spit on it, and it is essential that it should all be done fasting. A few years ago there was an old man at Bath who cured warts much in the same way. He would take no money in payment, but was willing to accept a pound of tea.

In justice to the much-laughed-at Sasernas, Varro afterwards said that the same sort of folly was to be found in other authors; even the great Cato gave recipes for making two kinds of cake, and advised those who wished to have a good appetite to eat a raw cabbage soaked in vinegar (sauerkraut?) before and after every meal. He means himself to avoid such frivolities. Agriculture is an art and a science,

and there is none more important. Culture makes the earth more pleasing to see while it raises its money value. The first is a statement which no Roman would have dreamt of contesting except, perhaps, Lucretius, whose "divine resting-places" can have been scarcely a ploughed field; but in Lucretius there was a grain of Orientalism which would have enabled him to understand the mysterious attraction of the wilderness for the solitaries of Palestine. Lucretius would not have said as Socrates said: "I am fond of learning something, and the hills and the trees cannot tell me anything, but the men in the city can." For which reason Socrates walked in the town and not in the country; though, if Nature had nothing to give him, he had something to give her, whereunto is witness the lovely myth he invented for the grasshoppers, and again that other, still more lovely, of the swans! The ordinary Roman had moved far away from the Attic love of towns; he liked a rural walk, above all, if it lay across his own property. He could even appreciate a wood, but his appreciation stopped short of the waste. There must have been then, as now, hillsides clad in the fragrant verdure of heath and lentisk and arbutus and myrtle, which makes the uncultivated lands of Corsica and Sardinia a garden of Eden to the modern beholder; but either Roman eyes could not see their beauty, or the Roman mind wilfully

rejected the idea that the unproductive could be beautiful. If aesthetically faulty, this principle is morally admirable. What fine sobriety is shown in the derivation of the names of the noblest families of Rome from the cultivation of particular kinds of grain, as the Fabii, Pisones, Lentuli, Cicerones, etc.! What a difference from Malatesta and Malacarne and Pelavicino!

Varro has the good sense, however, to place even productiveness in the rear of salubrity. It is wiser to choose a healthy situation than a fertile one, if you cannot have both. The cultivation of unhealthy lands is a game of chance in which the speculator stakes life and fortune. Nevertheless, science and money may mitigate the unhealthiness of a site. When Varro commanded the fleet at Corfu there was an epidemic so severe that the houses were full of sick and dead, but he ensured the safety of his men by making new windows towards the north, and closing those in the direction whence came the pestilential air. The natural quality of the air varies from the heavy, oppressive air of Apulia to the light, healthy air of Mount Vesuvius. Cato said that the best situation was at the foot of a mountain, with a south aspect. If you are obliged to build on low-lying ground, turn the face of the house away from the marsh. In dry weather marshes breed imperceptible animalcula, not to be seen by the eye,

which penetrate into the human body through the nose and mouth, and cause many dangerous diseases. "What am I to do then," asks Fundanius, "if I inherited such land, to preserve it from these malign influences?" The practical answer is, "By all means sell it, and if you cannot sell it, do not live there." Which makes one think of the answer of a young man at an examination of veterinary students in Lombardy. When asked what he would do with a horse which had such-and-such a complaint, he replied, "I should sell it at once"!

A high position, Varro points out, is always more healthy than a low one, because the least wind blows infection away from a height, and if there be noxious organisms, whether bred in the vicinity or wafted thither, the vivifying rays of the sun dissipate them and the dryness makes them perish. For Varro it may be claimed that he was a forerunner of Pasteur and of Ross; the minute insects, so small that the eye could not see them, which spread disease, were a fine guess for ages before the microscope. It is almost disappointing not to find him advising his friends to boil their drinking water, especially as he might have taken the hint from Herodotus, who mentions that Cyrus, the great king of Persia, when on the march, only drank boiled water, which was carried after him from place to place in silver vessels. So true is it that there is nothing new under the sun.

The farm-buildings form an essential branch in rural economy. The barn should be large enough to contain the whole harvest. Varro's dislike of gorgeous country-seats is endorsed by Fundanius, who declares that it is better to build on the principle of "our ancestors," who thought it enough to have a simple farmhouse with a handy kitchen and large cellars for oil and wine (the best were those constructed with slanting, paved floors, as the new wine often burst the Spanish tuns and even the Italian jars). In short, it was once sufficient for a country-house to possess what was required for the homestead, while now it was expected to be imposing and elegant and to rival those of Metellus and Lucullus, "to the great scandal of the Republic." People study to have dining-rooms east for summer and west for winter, and never heed where the apertures of the wine and oil cellars are placed, though much depends on that, as wine needs cool and oil needs warmer air.

The English practice of planting trees round an estate—which is never seen now in Italy—was in favour with the Romans. Varro mentions that his wife has planted pines round her Sabine property, and that he has planted cypresses round some land he owns near Vesuvius. Some prefer elms, which are the best if suited to the soil; others choose whitethorn hedges or a ditch or a low wall to mark the boundaries. In planting trees or vegetables it

is well to remember their natural antipathies ; olives object to oaks, vines to cypresses and to cabbages!—a prejudice which the modern vine seems to have outlived, as one frequently sees rows of cabbages in a vineyard.

Before buying an estate it is prudent to find out whether there are many thieves in the neighbourhood ; much land is rendered useless on this account. Rural theft makes part of Sardinia unlivable. What to plant should be regulated by your distance from a town ; if near one, a great deal may be made out of gardens ; violets, roses, and other flowers can be easily sold at a good profit. Those who live in remote places should have among their slaves some who can do a little carpentering and other artisan's work.

The soil was cultivated by slaves or by free peasants or by both. The free peasants either worked on their own small properties, helped by their children, or on the land of others, working for hire at certain periods, such as vintage and hay-harvest. There was another class of labourers called *obaerati*, which seems to have also existed in Egypt, but what they were is not explained. Varro counsels the employment of hired men rather than one's own slaves to cultivate unhealthy land, and even on healthy land to perform the more fatiguing tasks, such as fruit-picking, vintage, and harvest. They ought to

be strong, not under twenty-two years old, with an aptitude for agriculture. Ask them what they did when serving their former master, and what sort of cultivation is practised in the place they came from ; in this way you can find out their degree of intelligence.

The steward or bailiff should be strictly honest, possessed of some instruction, and not too young. He should be practically skilled in rustic labour, and not only in its theory. He must never employ violence when words suffice. The slaves should not be too bold or too meek ; it is better not to have too many of the same nation, as it is a source of dissensions. Encourage the head ones with hope of reward, such as gifts of money or a wife taken from the slaves serving with them ; this attaches them to the estate. The slaves reckoned the best and who cost most are the Epirotes ; they are always married. If you wish your slaves to take a pleasure in their work, show consideration for the heads and for all who do well, and consult them about the work to be done ; this will make them think that they are less despised. They will work the better if you give them good food and good clothing, and exempt them from the harder labour. The memory of any little kindness will help them to endure hardships, and give them affection for their master. Be sure that there is a covered shelter near the threshing-floor, where

the men may rest during the hot hours. There is reason to think that the spirit which inspired these good counsels was, on the whole, general. It is not worth while to inquire whether it was utilitarian or humane; love is often egotism, and virtue, as La Bruyère said, "loses itself in interest." It is a wise rule to treat human qualities objectively, and it is agreeable to believe that there was nothing extraordinary in the recorded case of a master who had made himself so beloved by his slaves that when he died they raised a monument to him out of their own savings.

All the time that this long discussion is going on the friends are still expecting the return of the Guardian of the Temple, one of whose freedmen at last appears on the scene, bathed in tears. He begs pardon for the long delay, and asks them to be present next day at the funeral. "What! whose funeral?" they exclaim, rising from their seats. Between his sobs the freedman relates that his master has been stabbed to death; the assassin escaped in the crowd, but some one said it was done by mistake. The servant took his master home and called a doctor, but in spite of their efforts he soon breathed his last. This is why the man did not come with the news at once, for which he again begs to be forgiven. Varro concludes: "We accepted his excuses and descended from the Temple, more struck by the events to

which humanity is exposed than surprised by that which had just happened in Rome."

It seems that Varro really intended to break off here, but the convenient friends who "wish for a little more" were equal to the occasion, and, like a true author, Varro did not need very much begging. The promise to write, after all, on the animals of the farm was made at the house of a common acquaintance, who was ill. In true Italian fashion his numerous visitors were about to begin an interminable discussion in the sick-room, but mercifully (as one must think) for the invalid, the talk was interrupted by the arrival of the doctor. Next time, however, that Varro met his friends they reminded him of the engagement, and there was nothing to stop the copious flow of conversation which was let loose forthwith.

He opens with a protest. In the good old days people divided their lives by seven days out of nine in the country, and they then could be strong and robust without the gymnastics now introduced from the Greeks, and hardly sufficing to keep in order the sinews of the degenerate Roman. Nearly all the heads of families were gone to live in town, leaving behind waggon and scythe, and preferring to use their hands for applauding in the theatre or the arena rather than to turn them to account in furrows or vineyard. Hence they have to import wheat from Africa and Sardinia and wine from Cos and Chios.

The same country which saw shepherds found a town and teach their children tillage, now sees the descendants of those founders converting arable land into pastures—an act of avarice contrary to all laws, human and divine, for the nourishment of man ranks before that of brutes.

After this exordium, which sounds rather as if it came from a Socialist agitator, Varro confesses that live stock may be useful for eating off the hay, and also because of the manure. He once possessed many sheep in Apulia and horses in the province of Rieti; and when he commanded the Greek squadron during the pirate war (he means the squadron in Greek waters) he often conversed with the masters of vast flocks of Epirus. His experience, therefore, is both extensive and practical, which does not always follow, as you may have a lyre and not know how to play it, and you may keep flocks and be ignorant of the shepherd's art. He describes the evolution of man from a fruit-eating animal to the pastoral stage, when he tamed wild creatures. The sheep, he thinks, was man's first conquest, from its double service of wool and of milk, and from its gentle nature, easily subdued. In fact, the moufflon, or wild sheep of Corsica, a very shy animal, becomes perfectly tame if born in captivity, as may be seen at Monte Carlo, where the mouffions kept in the garden are happy to eat bread from the hands of visitors.

Even now all domestic animals exist somewhere in a wild state: sheep in Phrygia; goats in Samothrace and in the isle of Capraria called after them; wild pigs in all parts, if the wild boar is a pig; wild bulls in Dardania, Media, and Thrace; wild asses in Phrygia and Lycaonia; wild horses in some parts of Spain. The value of fleeces caused them to be called "golden" in the old stories. An ardent if rash philologist, Varro embraces the theory that Italy took its name from its fine cattle. He gives a prominent place to the ass as a farm animal; there should be three asses, he says, to every pair of oxen. They turned mills, carried manure, and could be put to do anything. The best ones came from Rieti, and a very good one might cost a sum which would buy a modern race-horse. He insists, unheeded to this day, on the necessity of dry stables and sheepfolds. Damp gives sheep a disease of the hard part of the foot as well as spoiling the wool. The stable windows should be to the south, and the slanting floor should be kept clean by changing the litter every few days. He mentions that goats are always ailing, especially when kept in large herds. Goats should never be allowed to enter the plantations owing to their destructive habits.

Next, dogs are considered. They should be few, but of good race, and shepherds' dogs are the best. The dog is more attached to the shepherd than to

the flock. A Roman bought some flocks in Umbria and stipulated that the dogs but not the men were to be included in the sale. The shepherds were to lead the flocks to their destination in the woods of Metaponto in Magna Graecia, and then, secretly and without the dogs seeing them start, they were to return to their own country. This was done, but a few days after the men departed the dogs disappeared, and it came to be known that they reached Umbria safely, though they had no food but what they could find in the fields. Yet, says Varro ironically, none of these shepherds had done what Saserna prescribes in his book on agriculture: "Whoever wishes to make a dog follow him gives him a cooked frog." (N.B.—Dogs will not eat the "green fat" of turtle, and it is doubtful if they would eat cooked frogs, though the present writer has never tried.) The prudent husbandman feeds his dogs well on bones and what is left on the plates, or soup made from bones, or barley bread in milk. If they are hungry they wander and even turn on their master. They should wear a leather collar with spikes as a protection against wolves or other enemies—a custom still observed in the Campagna, where the dogs, which are very dangerous if met in lonely places, are the direct descendants of those of Rome.

The men in charge of large flocks and herds in

the open should be robust and full-grown, and they must always go armed. For small flocks which return to the fold at night, youths or even girls will suffice. They should be under a capable overseer, of a certain age, as befits one in authority, but not too old, for old men, like children, cannot climb mountains or cover long distances. They should be supple, quick, light, and strong, not only to follow the cattle but also to hold their own with wild beasts and brigands. Gauls are very good, especially for taking care of beasts of burden. It is best to marry the shepherds, as they will not then seek their love far from the homestead. If possible, the wives should accompany them to the hut or cabin when they go to the forest or waste lands. These women should be robust and active, but not ugly. In Liburnia you may watch these shepherds' wives carrying wood with one or two children at the breast. In Illyris (Albania) they help the men in everything; you often see a woman cease from her work and retire for a few moments, after which she reappears with a new baby which she seems to have found on a tree. In that country girls wander about choosing whom they will and going where they choose up to twenty years of age, nor is it thought a reproach to them if they bear children. The head shepherd or overseer should know something of medicine, to be able to look after the sick when the

doctor is far off, or in slight illness when he can be dispensed with.

Varro is called away (so he tells us) by a pressing reminder of an invitation to a garden-party. Not long afterwards he and Senator Q. Axius went to vote for the nomination of the Aedile. They intended to wait to accompany their candidate home when the election was decided, and as the sun was hot they went under the shelter raised for the public. There they found a host of friends and they were soon all talking about what forms the subject of the third part of Varro's treatise, the minor produce of the farm, which, as he shows, may add materially to the income to be derived from it.

A simple rural life was Varro's unchanging ideal, and he always goes back to the text, "We owe the earth to Divine Nature, the towns to human industry," which is the same as to say, "God made the country and man made the town." But while condemning the extravagant luxury of great cities he was too sharp a man of business not to see that the farmer might turn it much to his profit. The succession of *fêtes* and banquets in Rome ensured the fortune of any one who could provide a large quantity of delicacies at a given moment. The owner of a single *uccellanda*, or bird-snaring place, sold the thrushes which he took in one season for £500. The ancient Romans had the same passion as the modern

Italians for small birds, which survived, nevertheless, in undiminished numbers till now, when the possibility of quick transport, combined with the enormous demand for them *for English tables*, threatens several species with extinction. Speculators in small birds kept thousands in aviaries to have them ready when they were in most request. Varro gives minute instructions for the arrangement of these aviaries. They should be near a river with little running streams flowing through them, and high hedges should shield them from the wind—a wise precaution, as there is nothing that birds suffer from so much as a draught. Each aviary was partitioned into courts, the most privileged court being reserved for nightingales and other songsters! At Tusculum, Lucullus had a dining-room built in the middle of an aviary, so that he saw the live thrushes flying around whilst he was eating the cooked ones. "But," said Varro, "he had no imitators."

Spending for the mere sake of spending already amounted to a mania. Hortensius, who was reported to water his plants with wine, was the first to serve up peacocks in a sumptuous repast when he was appointed augur, "for which he was more applauded by the dissolute than by people of worth"; yet many followed his example, and the price of peacocks rose to such a point that an egg

was worth 3s. 4d., and a peacock could be sold for £2, more than the value of a sheep. Here was the farmer's opportunity.

Then, as now, wild boars were plentiful in the Pontine Marshes and the Maremme. On an estate which Varro bought in the neighbourhood of Tusculum the wild boars and the roebucks assembled at the sound of a horn to eat the food thrown down to them from a terrace. Some one present remarks that he has seen a still more interesting thing at Q. Hortensius' place near Laurentum, where a forest, fifty acres in extent, was enclosed by a wall and given the name of Wild Beast Nursery. Lying on couches, on a raised spot, they dined in the forest, when all at once Quintus called "Orpheus," and a slave appeared dressed in a long white robe, with a lyre in his hand, the image of his prototype. At a sign from the host, "Orpheus" sounded a horn, and hundreds of deer, wild boars, and other forest creatures assembled beneath. It was a finer sight, adds the narrator, than the combats of wild beasts in the Arena.

Doubtless Varro was aware of what his friend Cicero thought about the shows of the Arena :

> The remainder of our diversions consisted in combats of wild beasts, which were exhibited every morning and afternoon during five days successively ; and, it must be owned, they were magnificent. Yet, after all, what entertainment

can possibly arise to an elegant and humanised mind, from seeing a noble beast struck to the heart by its merciless hunter, or one of our own weak species cruelly mangled by an animal of much superior strength ?[1]

After reading these words it seems surprising that in a much later age so highly cultivated a man as Symmachus could fail entirely to see the pathos of the fact that the Saxon prisoners, whom he had counted on for the next day's gladiatorial show (because they were strong and courageous), killed each other overnight rather than fight to make a Roman's holiday. But in that late time the Roman pagan had an idea that these spectacles were wrapped up in some way with the greatness of Rome, which, they feared, the softer Christian sentiment would undermine, and so they clung to them with renewed enthusiasm. They might have remembered that in Greece, though efforts were made to acclimatize these shows (especially at Corinth), they never became really national. Lucian tells that when it was proposed to start them at Athens, a wise philosopher stepped forward and said : "Men of Athens, before you pass this motion, do not forget to destroy the Altar of Pity!" Their final disappearance was the first moral victory of Christianity, and a great one. It is sad that bull-fights remain, but fortunate that when a Socialist deputy tried to introduce this blot

[1] Cicero to Marcus Marius, A.U. 698.

on civilisation into new Rome, Italian public opinion raised such a shout of indignation that the project was promptly abandoned.

Fish was in great demand at Rome, and incredible sums might be made by fish-ponds or wasted on them. The humble fish-pond of the people, supplied with rain-water and replenished by fish taken out of rivers or lakes, brought in large returns. The aristocratic fish-pond, furnished by Neptune and constructed with elaborate art, was more apt to empty pockets than to fill them. It cost a fortune to build it, to stock it, and to feed the fish. One possessor of such a fish-nursery made nearly £200 a year by it, but it cost the whole profit to keep it up. They were expensive toys rather than serious investments. Varro once saw a sacred tank in Lydia containing fish which came to the edge at the sound of a flute and which no one was allowed to touch; the fish of the Roman noble are, he says, nearly as sacred. Hortensius, who had spent a mint of money on his salt-water fish-tanks at Bauli, was found out in buying all the fish for his table at Pozzuoli. He fed his fishes himself, and was much more anxious lest they should be hungry "than I am about my asses, which bring me in a good profit," Varro scornfully remarks. Half the fishermen of the place were employed in catching small fish to give to the big ones, and salted fish was provided when

the sea was too rough for the boats to go out. Hortensius would make you a present of a team of mules sooner than of a single one of his mullets. Lucullus gave *carte blanche* to his architect to ruin him if he could manage, by means of subterranean passages, to contrive a sort of tide in his tanks at Baiae, so as to keep the water cool in summer, when fishes in confinement suffer much from the heat, as I have been told at the Naples Aquarium, a beautiful and wonderful place, surpassing the dreams even of a Roman fish-maniac.

Varro speaks of some one who was more anxious about his sick fishes than about his sick slaves; but the story of the Roman "who fattened his lampreys on his slaves" belongs to after-times. Like other stories which are told for the benefit of youth, it lacks exactitude. This seems to have been the truth: a millionaire freedman of the name of Pollio Vedius was entertaining Augustus at supper when a slave broke a crystal goblet; Pollio, enraged, ordered him to be thrown to the fishes; the slave appealed to the Emperor, who asked his host to pardon him, but Pollio refused. Augustus then pardoned the man himself, and had all Pollio's crystal goblets broken and the fish-pond filled up.

Bee-culture held an important place among the farmer's minor cares. Varro believed, as Virgil did after him, that bees could be obtained from a

slaughtered ox. He thought that honey was derived from certain plants and wax from others; the fig yielding honey and the olive wax, while bean-flowers, lavender, and almond-blossom were rich in both. If the soil does not produce naturally the bees' favourite flowers, especially thyme, which gives the honey the spicy flavour so much appreciated in the kind imported from Sicily or Corsica, they may be planted. The Romans hated the indomitable Corsican, of all their slaves the only one who could not, or would not, live in servitude, who died like a wild bird in a cage. But they had discovered that Corsican honey surpassed even that of Syracuse or Hymettus, and it does so still. The plan suggested by Varro has been tried by English bee-keepers, with the result, in one instance at least, that the bees obstinately shunned the plot planned for them to seek unlawful bliss among a neighbour's bitter-tasting lime-flowers. Bees range over immense distances, and, even were miles of thyme planted, how supply the multitudinous sweets of Nature's alchemy? How give the fragrance of the *macchia*, by which Napoleon recognised Corsica in the dark when he was being taken to Elba?

Varro says that bees, "birds of the Muses," can be assembled or scattered by music, in which, perhaps, we may see the origin of the famous tin kettles which the English villager brings into action when

his bees are swarming. There is no allusion to the belief that bees desert a house if not told when the master dies, but we hear that Roman bees disliked solitude. They also disliked an echo, and were said to fly away from a place where there was one. In spite of imperfect knowledge, Varro had closely observed their ways, their industry, their love of only what is clean and sweet, their "cities," as he calls them, and their government, about which he makes few mistakes, except that he supposes the queen to be a king.

The Friends in Council were still pleasantly talking when their candidate for the office of Aedile came on the scene with the news that he was elected. After congratulations, they accompanied him to the Capitol and thence each went to his own house. So the treatise ends with a little touch recalling that ever-present public life which wound itself in and out of all the Roman citizen's interests and occupations.

VII

VIRGIL IN THE COUNTRY

Io toglierò il poeta dalle scuole degli eruditi, dalle academie dei letterati, dalle aule dei potenti, e lo restituirò a te, o popolo di agricoltori e di lavoratori, o popolo vero d' Italia. Egli è sangue vostro e vostra anima; egli è un antico fratello, un paesano, un agricoltore, un lavoratore italico, che dalle rive del Mincio salì al Campidoglio e dal Campidoglio all' Olimpo.—G. Carducci. (Per la inaugurazione d' un monumento a Virgilio.)

To Virgil the problems of existence appeared in a less complex form than to the great Roman poet who preceded him. Like Lucretius, he was drawn to the conception of Nature as a divine force, but he shaped it in his own intellectual mould. He could not think of such a force except as beneficent, and thus the tilling of the soil became to him a holy ministry, a kind of sacrament. The cultivator was the priest who gave the gift on the altar to the people. He co-operated in a divine scheme of which man, nay, and the very gods, were the inevitable instruments.

The idea that the cultivator of the soil is, in a way, acting a consecrated part, was not confined to

Virgil; it is noticeable, for instance, in that beautiful essay of Cicero on old age, of which Montaigne said, "il donne l'appétit de vieillir." After declaring that nothing contributes so much to a happy old age as the management of a country estate with its well-ordered vineyards, olive-groves and plantations, Cicero answers the possible objection, "What is the good of all this when you are too old to hope to see your labours fulfilled and rewarded?" in the noble words: "If any one should ask the cultivator for whom he plants, let him not hesitate to make this reply: 'For the immortal gods who, as they willed me to inherit these possessions from my forefathers, so would have me hand them on to those that shall come after.'"

To rejoice in the good things of Nature, the beautiful earth, the glorious sun, the fruitful fields, was for Virgil almost an act of worship; had he been told that a preacher would arise who turned from the genial light as from a snare, he would have charged him with blasphemy. The view of the visible world filled him with pious exultation; but besides being a religious man, Virgil was an artist, and Nature delighted him because it is such excellent art. In looking at a meadow he felt what Balzac felt when he said, "Oh! voilà la vraie littérature! Il n'y a jamais de faute de style dans une prairie."

Virgil's own origin (not differing much from that

of Shakespeare) had a lasting effect in determining his character. He never became a thorough townsman; even in his appearance there was said to be something countrified. All his life he felt keenly the loss of his father's farm on the Mincio. The Civil Wars which ended with the fall of the Republic at Philippi, were the cause of the confiscations in which Virgil's property was involved. Cremona having backed Pompey, its territory was given to the soldiers who fought against him and in favour of Augustus. The *plaga del Mantovano*, being near at hand, had the same fate meted out to it. Scholars have not yet decided the exact locality of the poet's estate, though every villager of Pietole is ready to stake his life on Dante's accuracy in placing it in that commune. Tradition in such cases is not to be lightly set aside, but strong reasons have been advanced for thinking that the farm lay farther away from Mantua and nearer to where the Mincio leaves the Lake of Garda. This situation gives the scenery of the *Eclogues* with the gentle hills so often described in them. There is no doubt that Virgil was thinking less of Sicily than of his childhood's home when he wrote those early poems, in several of which he alludes to his own troubles under what must have been then a transparent disguise. It seems that, touched by his songs, Augustus intervened to save "all that land where the hills begin to

decline and by an easy declivity to sink their ridges as far as the water and the old beeches whose tops are now broken"; but that, either because it was difficult to make an exception in his favour or from some other cause, the Imperial benevolence was speedily revoked. He describes the neighbours bewailing the loss of him: "Who would now be their poet?" The farm hands know snatches of his verses, just as Verdi's peasants at Busseto sang his airs as they followed the plough.

If Virgil ever did hear any of his lines repeated by peasant folk, one may be sure that he was better pleased by it than by many a loftier sign of popularity. He evidently listened with pleasure to folk-songs; he would never have spoken with scorn, like the old poet Ennius, of "the songs of fauns and bards of ancient times." He makes the long-haired bard Iopas sing of the sun and moon, rain and lightning, the seasons, man, and cattle, at the banquet of Dido. He notices the wife singing over her household tasks and the shepherd youths whose high voices send a thrill of passion through the summer nights. Any one who is familiar with the Italian folk-songs of to-day must fancy that he catches in the exquisite songs of Damon and Alphesiboeus something more than the popular spirit—almost the words, here and there, of folk-poets of long ago.

Virgil observed and remembered, and even when

he is most conventional there is an undercurrent of truth, of experience. In the first place, his enjoyment is so sincere that even an artificial setting could not make the substance of his picture false. He actually thought that a town mansion crammed with *bric-à-brac* bought or looted (which made a Roman house of that period almost as impossible to turn round in as an English house of this) was a less agreeable place to live in than a plain farm interior, surrounded by the luxury of the countryside.

Who was ever dull in the country that had eyes and ears—if there was nothing but the birds, who could be dull? Virgil knew them well; he watched the winged legions as they hastened to the woods at dusk; he took attentive note of the larks and kingfishers, the chattering swallows skimming over the pools before rain, the wood-pigeon cooing itself hoarse, and the sweeter turtle-dove in its airy elm. He has been blamed for making the nightingale bemoan her lost young which the cruel ploughman had taken unfledged from the nest, because, it is objected, the nightingale does not sing after the eggs are hatched; but if the objector would take the train to Mantua in June he would hear nightingales singing so loudly in the woods through which the railway passes, as it nears the morass, that they drown the noise of the engine. Climate and environment have much influence on birds' singing.

Italians often say that the robin is not a singing-bird ; and though he sings in my garden, in many places he is a bird of passage and does not stay long enough to sing. Nightingales stop singing sooner in northern than in southern climes ; and the English critic, though right as to his own birds, was wrong as to Virgil's—a point worth mentioning, trifling as it seems, for the reason that it shows how difficult it is to decide offhand upon the reality or unreality of the whole class of Bucolics unless you know the country which inspired them. A more grounded reproach against this particular passage would be that it is not mourning which makes the nightingale pour out his passionate soul in song—it is hope, desire, pain, perhaps, not regret. But the error belongs to the legend-weaver, to the child-man to whom all the songs of birds sounded sad ; who, in Sclavonic lands, interpreted even the cuckoo's cry to mean a dirge.

Virgil has one bird-picture which now, at least, is more English than Italian, that of the rooks bustling among the branches of the tall trees and cawing joyfully because the rain is over, happy in their nests and little ones. The rookery remains in England, with certain other free, wild things intermixed closely with cultivation that give a sense of the unexpected to the English wold for which in Italy one has to go to the pathless Maremme or the

bare, mysterious deserts of the south. It is surprising, by the bye, not how many, but how few suggestions of a wilder nature can be found in Virgil's rural poetry. The land under cultivation (according to some calculations a larger area than at present) must have exhibited the same signs of orderly arrangement, of minute utilisation of the smallest spaces, that a well-cared-for Italian estate exhibits to-day. Probably it was in the north of Italy, then as now, that farming was most scientifically practised; we know that the chief irrigatory canals date from Roman times. As Virgil's landscape is north Italian with the background which we *feel* even when we do not see it, of the "aerial Alps," so his peasant is essentially a north Italian *contadino*. Let us inquire what kind of life he led.

The luxuries which the Virgilian husbandman allows himself in the way of food are fruit, chestnuts, and pressed curd, the modern *mascherpone*. A salad or a drink made with pounded garlic and thyme refreshes him after moving the sweet hay through the precious hours when the morning star shines in the sunrise. At noon he sleeps under a tree while the herds low not far off. When the smoke rises from the village and the shadows lengthen on the hills, he returns to the house where the girls are carding wool and the wife is boiling down sweet wine, which makes an excellent drink. She finds

time to ply the shuttle between her other occupations, singing as she weaves to make the toil less tedious. There is always indoor work for women to do where they spin the clothes of the family. Only when the indestructible frieze made from the peasants' own fleeces is replaced by shoddy cotton are women set to do men's work out of doors. That never-ending spinning was a bond of union, too, between all classes; "quando Berta filava," say the Italian peasants, remembering the queen who spun. I have seen a coat made from what was possibly the last piece of cloth spun by noble Italian hands; it came to Lombardy in the middle of the last century, a gift from a Sardinian countess.

When Virgil's husbandman takes his evening rest, his sweet children come round him, the girls modest and fair to see, the boys willing to work, not spendthrift, observant of religion, reverent towards age. He himself is a careful observer of feast-days; on them he abstains from all hard labour, only doing such light tasks as can offend no god, raising a fence, snaring birds, washing sheep, or driving the ass to the town with a load of apples, and bringing back some needful tools. Winter is his long rest-time; then he invites and accepts invitations to little-costing gaieties. Yet in winter there are numberless small things to be done; storing olives, acorns, and bay-berries—those that

have been picked, for some always fall on the ground, and under every old bay-tree there is a little forest of young ones—a true detail. (What, one would like to know, were bay-berries used for then? Now they are made to yield a strong poison.) Hunting hares and netting roebuck are other winter employments; and if the peasant wants amusement, he goes to watch the herdsmen in their wrestling matches. He has also the most charming of toys—a bit of garden, half kitchen-garden half flower-bed. It is the *orto* of the modern peasant, with its sage and rosemary, its lettuces and leeks, its purple iris (*Spade di Sant' Antonio*) and virgin lilies.

A peasant who is old and past hard work may even devote himself wholly to a garden. Thus did the ancient Corycian peasant turn a few poor abandoned acres that had been thought good for nothing into the sweetest place in the world. Around he set a fence of thorns, inside he sowed a few vegetables, and planted simple flowers. At night he could set something on his table, a salad, a few onions, two or three pears, and he felt possessed of the riches of kings. His roses, sweet as Paestum's, were before any one else's; his fruit was the earliest to ripen. And how well his bees flourished; what a rich store of frothing honey they furnished! Happy old man!

The husbandman had Nature always with him.

He lived with her beauty, and to live with the beauty of Nature was worth all the fine houses with door-posts set with tortoise-shell and cornices inlaid with gold—so Virgil thought. Yet the farmer's son knew too much of agriculture to imagine that all was bliss in Arcadia. In the first place, there was insecurity of tenure with a vengeance. You might lose your land by sheer confiscation, as Virgil himself had done; or you might be shipped off bodily to the torrid sands of the contemporary Massowah, or, just as bad, to Britain, "totally separated from the rest of the world." In that case, even if your homestead was not sequestered before you left, ten to one, if you ever chance to come back, you will find some brutal soldier in possession of the fields you tilled with so much love. A strange man meets you with the words, "These are mine; get you gone, old tenants!" The present of kids which Moeris sends the new master will neither soften his heart nor will it carry with it the bad luck which the sender would very gladly convey with it. Of human redress there is none, and Virgil does not propose recourse to the Black Art. He kept the charms, of which he had an extensive knowledge, for the service of lovers, who in the Roman provinces and in the Tuscany weave the self-same incantations in A.D. 1911. Even the were-wolves, spoken of by the poet, have their descendants in the *Cani guasti* which frighten children

who go out after dark in Umbria. Virgil was interested in charms because he had the soul of a folklorist, but though he believed firmly in dreams and omens, it may be doubted if he took witchcraft very seriously. He would have been the first to be surprised at finding himself converted into a wizard in the Middle Ages.

Even if left, by a wonder, in peaceful possession of his farm, Virgil's farmer has still his full share of cares and ills. He suffers from dishonest farm-servants; from the hireling who neglects the flock because he is a hireling, and who robs the lambs of the milk which should be theirs. Then he is worried by cranes and wild geese, and noxious weeds, thistles, and wild oats, by mildew, wolves, mice, moles, weevils, and harvesting ants, which, "fearful of an indigent old age," take a toll upon his store. Also he thinks that he loses somehow by toads in which he is mistaken. Furthermore, drought affects his crops, and if not drought, then thunderstorms bringing the horrid hail which rattles and dances on the roof, and ill can the vine leaves protect the grapes against it. A tremendous wind blows up, tearing the corn from the ground and whirling it in the air; rain follows, a solid black blank of water which, when it bursts, washes away the crops, and blots out in a few minutes the patient toil of the year. Virgil must have seen that sight often in Northern Italy, where

the cold air from the Alps meets the hot exhalations from the Po in one spot or another, with fearful consequences, on almost every summer day. No one can tell what it is who has not seen it. Once, on the evening of such a storm, all our peasants at Rovato were eating small birds, sixty of which had been found killed. Another time, I went to Roccafranca the day after a *temporale* which will be remembered for years; the factor and his wife described to me how they had watched the crashing downfall of hail, consisting of large pieces of jagged ice, for ten minutes; not more. Then it ceased, the thunder grew faint, and they went out to see acres on acres of hay ready for the scythe ironed as flat as though a steam-roller had passed over it, while the swelling wheat-ears, severed with a certain neatness from their stalks, were scattered in all directions. "We cried," they said. It was not their loss, it was ours; but they had witnessed the patient human labour bestowed upon these fields where there would be no harvest, and the tragedy of the thing struck them more keenly than it did me. "And the nightingales?" I asked; for a pair of nightingales nest every year close to the house, arriving on the same day in March. The nightingales, I was told, had sung all the night as if nothing had happened; the dense foliage of the magnolias must have shielded them.

In the south of Italy such storms rarely occur; Virgil's experience of them doubtless dated from his Mantuan farming days, as he seems to suggest by the personal note which he brings into the description.

There is much in the *Georgics* about the intelligent care needed in cultivating the vines, though the vine-dresser of those days had not to be constantly abroad with his sulphur-sprinkler and with the host of chemical messes on which his successor depends in striving with diseases then undreamt of. Nor do the olives appear to have been subject to the decay (though it is an old disease) which necessitates lopping and incision, leaving the tree saved but maimed. The ground round the trunks was broken up by the plough, but the practice came in later of enriching it with rags, unfragrant bales of which, of Oriental origin, disturb the nerves of the sanitary reformer in his holiday on the Riviera. What Lucretius so plainly foretold has come to pass—the virgin soil yielded abundantly if only scratched, but every generation has a heavier toil in supplying that which has been taken away.

If the plants of the earth were healthier and more vigorous in Virgil's time than they are now, no modern cattle-blight was ever more destructive than the very horrible rinderpest or influenza recorded in the third *Georgic*. Some commentators have thought

that Virgil introduced this episode because Lucretius had made similar use of the plague of Athens. It can hardly be doubted, however, that it was based on the tradition or recollection of a real fact. The disease took the form of a mysterious malarious epidemic, coming with unseasonably warm weather, and affecting even the fishes, as influenza in the first year of its appearance affected the trout and *carpioni* of the Lake of Garda. There is one touch in the narrative of which every one has felt the pathos though not every one has recognised the truth—I mean the reference to the ox that mourns for its yoke-fellow and loses spirit and pines away. Our *bifolco* bears out Virgil's correctness. Nor is it strange if we come to think of it; the effect of sorrow or even of dulness on animals as on savages, *when they feel it*, is far more fatal than it is on civilised man. The many stories of dogs and birds that died of grief may well be true, as most people can recall some instance to the point. I knew a parrot which hopped into the room where its master lay dead (he was an old French physician); after looking at him for some time, it hopped back again to its perch, refused food, and in three days was dead. Self-starvation is not always necessary; the Maoris die when they determine that they have lived long enough, even if forced to eat. There is probably a psychological state of passive abandonment which

kills very soon, but it is hardly ever reached by man when he ceases to be primitive, except when his vitality is lowered by illness and he "gives himself up for lost"—the results of which every doctor knows.

Apart from that great epidemic, it would appear that animals were as liable to suffer then as now. Life has even, says the poet, entailed our misfortunes on the bees, of which he gives a deplorable account in their sick condition. The *Georgics* is one of the most faultless of poems; but perhaps a reader here and there has privately regretted that so much stress is laid upon the details of these animal plagues. But Virgil was resolved not to soften any of the lines of his picture, not to "retouch" the photograph; it was a matter of conscience with him to be sincere. In spite of these drawbacks he deliberately held that the proprietor of a moderate-sized estate (he objected to a large acreage) was a person greatly to be envied. "Happy the husbandman if he only knew it!" Life is best judged by its compensations, and of compensations, both on the lower and the higher plane, the agriculturist has more than the followers of other callings. His work is its own reward. If Hesiod's cry was "Work, work, work," Virgil added, "Yes, and in that work you will find the best return that human existence can give." The poem of the *Georgics* is a hymn to labour. If rightly read, we

see in it also a hymn to patriotism. The old connection between the love of the land and the love of *our* land, which is so near the root of the matter, and which yet is so far from the thoughts of the town-bred or nomadic politicians who are inclined to claim a monopoly of the patriotism of the twentieth century, was to Virgil an absolutely real fact. Man in his simplicity gets to love the familiar features of the landscape round him as he loves the familiar faces which he saw when he was a child. Then steps in the reflection, "Here my fathers died, and here my children will live when I am dead"; and to this, again, is added, if he have even the smallest piece of ground which he calls his own, the immeasurably strong instinct shared by all creatures, to defend their own nest, their own lair, against all comers. This is the beginning of patriotism, and though it may be called narrow or selfish, it was as good a thing for a man to think of his country thus as to think of her as a scantily dressed female figure on a monument. Virgil himself combined the pride of empire in its loftiest sense with the strong primitive love of his birth-land which he had inherited from his yeoman forefathers. The inspired *Vates* of the Roman race, he was yet an Italian first; he was indeed the first poet of an United Italy.

"Rich in crops and rich in heroes," so he described his country, and he was contented to sing of crops

and of heroes. He was quite as serious about the first as about the last, quite as sure of the majesty of the argument. He called the husbandman the prop of the State. The story that he wrote the *Georgics* at the request of the Maecenas with the fixed purpose of attaching retired soldiers to the land awarded to them is not likely to be true; but the appearance of the work was much more than a mere literary event. Its success was immediate and immense. Augustus had it read to him four times running. Though Hesiod was venerated by all generations of Greeks, it is not possible to imagine him writing his *Book of Days* in the age of Pericles. That he was archaic was one reason why they admired him. It pleased them to picture their remote ancestors being instructed by the rude old poet in

> Ploughing and sowing and rural affairs,
> Rural economy, rural astronomy,
> Homely morality, labour, and thrift.

But their affection for these excellent things became, little by little, somewhat platonic. While the aesthetic aspects of a country life always appealed to the Greeks they were not wrought (if we accept Xenophon) to much enthusiasm by its practical duties. On the other hand, Virgil found an audience not only ready to admire his work as a great poem, but also to take a lively interest in it as a farm manual. Nor has this engrained Italian interest in

agricultural operations ever died out. There is, for instance, a month in the year when the most highly cultured Italians in Lombardy think by day and dream by night of silkworms. Some years before his death, I called in June on the *doyen* of Italian literature, Cesare Cantú. The delightful old man greeted me with his charming cordiality, and began to show me the books which lined his pleasant apartment in the Via Morigi (Milan); but before long came the inevitable question, "E come vanno i bachi?" and literary conversation had to retreat from the field. Another time I was at Athens at the same season. I had been conversing with the Italian Minister about the Acropolis Museum, Eleusis, Marathon, when he exclaimed with a look of ecstatic pride, "Come and see my cocoons!" The "ruling passion" had induced him to *educare* (as the Italian phrase is) a quantity of silkworms in the centre of Athens, and there were the cocoons, the finest I ever saw, neatly arranged on tables in the lower quarters of the Italian Legation. One more modern instance. At a great reception at Milan the Duchess Melzi met Count Alfonso Visconti di Saliceto—last direct descendant of the ruling house of Visconti, and himself a survivor of those Lombard aristocrats who carried their valour to the farthest ends of Italy in the wars for freedom. Holding out her hand, the *grande dame* greeted her old friend with the cryptic

exclamation, "Settanta-cinque!" It simply meant that one ounce of silkworms' eggs purchased from him had produced seventy-five kilogrammes of cocoons. The Count said, as he told the story, "Nothing in the world could have given me so much pleasure!"

It was among people who had this sort of unsentimental taste in country concerns that "Il cantor dei bucolici carmi" found an appreciation, not only fervid, but also intelligent and sympathetically critical.

VIII

TIBULLUS AT HIS FARM

The country is the workshop of the many, the playground of the few. To some it has been and it will ever be less a playground than a hospital; the refuge from all the forms of disillusion: deceived love, disappointed ambition, political discouragement, simple *ennui.* Men fly the tedium of crowds for solitude, at once narcotic and intoxicant, which sends the soul to sleep and wakes it to delightful dreams. Only the hermit in his mountain cell quite knows the meaning of the word excitement. Such things were always true, but they were not always rendered an account of. The poet of antiquity who most consciously "returned to Nature" to comfort his sad heart with her healing sights was the *Romano di Roma,* the Rome-born Tibullus.

Another poet had taken far from towns the burden of an infinite sorrow, but not for comfort; not even *venusta Sirmio* could assuage its master's all too real and too irremediable wound. The heart-

ache of Tibullus was also real to him, but it was self-centred and to a certain degree self-sought, unless we are to accept the results of temperament as inevitable. He was haunted by a gentle but persistent melancholy, which pervades his poetry like a *Leitmotif*. Death had less a particular than a universal meaning for him; he does not seem to have felt the sharp edge of any severe loss; his father probably died before he was grown up, and his mother and sister lived to close his eyes. But, as if in prevision of his own early end, he was for ever aware of the presence of death, and he made no Stoical boast of indifference to it—he was very human. In his happiest time of love his cry is "Let me behold thee when my last hour is come, let me hold thee with my dying hand"; he bids Delia to his funeral, which, in his imagination, he distinctly sees. When that was written he was in excellent health, and was in possession of many of the best gifts of fate—great talents, a handsome person, hosts of friends, among whom was Horace, who thought him particularly fortunate. Though a good deal of property which he ought to have inherited was confiscated, he was placed above the need of presents from patrons, so that he could preserve a perfect independence in his friendships with men of high position; an advantage of which those who had it not, could, no doubt, keenly appreciate the value.

Of external causes for his low spirits two have been discerned: the infidelities of the woman he loved and could not help loving, knowing well her unworthiness, and, again, the soreness he felt as an aristocratic Roman patriot at the downfall of freedom, in which he drew no consolation from the larger vision of a great Italy that shone on Virgil's prophetic eyes. But if those things helped to give him a distaste for the world, the secret of his melancholy must be chiefly looked for in a mind without ambition, almost without aspirations; full of vague regrets, wide sympathies, aesthetic sensibilities; prone to self-analysis, impressed with a sense of surrounding mystery, but not with the desire to penetrate it. Tibullus was the child of a tired age, of a century sick with many of the intellectual maladies of our own.

The principal part of the property remaining to him lay at a place called Pedum, on the spurs of the Apennines (not far from Palestrina), where the poet had spent much of his childhood. The situation is still delightful, and then presented a pleasant mixture of cultivated land and woods. At this Pedum farm he gained the intimate knowledge of peasant-folk which enabled him to draw a series of country scenes that combine the pious beauty of Millet with something of the crude humour of Teniers. Take one of these, the forecast of a prosperous year. Laurel

boughs crackle in the sacred fire, and farmers rejoice and thus interpret the omen : granaries will be full, and the vats not large enough to contain the wine when the rustic has trodden out the grapes and sated himself with the sweet inebriating must. New children will be born, and the little boy, the treasure of the house, will catch his father's ears and kiss him ; nor will the old grandfather tire of watching his little grandson and prattling with the child in broken words. It is strange that before the coming of the master-teacher of "l'art d'être grandpère," the two poets who best understood the charms of babyhood were two young bachelors—Catullus and Tibullus.

The rustics of Tibullus are not impossible innocents, but it is with a tolerant eye that he observes their excesses. He is more amused than shocked when they take more than is good for them. Once, indeed, he gives a little word of reproof. The incident is in this wise : a peasant owner goes with his wife and children to a picnic in the Holy Grove. They have a "real good time" ; prayers to the gods are succeeded by a feast *al fresco*, and nothing occurs to mar their enjoyment. But when the dusk comes and they drive back in the cart, thoroughly tired as workers so easily are with pleasure, the peasant, being not very sober, begins to disagree with his wife. After they get home the

quarrel thickens; spiteful words are bandied to and fro, the wife has her ears boxed, and, alas! her locks *cut off*. Then she cries, and in the end he cries, too, to see the work of his mad hands:

> We fell out, my wife and I,
> And kissed again with tears.

A satisfactory ending; but, says Tibullus, how much better it would have been to have only pulled her hair down and not to have cut it off!

The most touching rites of rural piety were those connected with the humble family worship of the paternal Lares—the souls of the righteous departed who were appointed or permitted to watch over the living. How the Italian people clung to a belief in a present and familiar guardian—one who had lived on earth and who could sympathise with their small necessities—may be still seen in the niche with an image over the cottage door, or the shrine with a picture in the corner of the cornfield. If the peasant is extremely prosperous, a white cloth edged with lace, which hangs down in front, is placed before the picture or image, and on the cloth stand two high-backed vases containing artificial flowers. If the worshipper is very poor, the flowers are real, and a disused meat-tin, picked up out of the road, serves for a vase. The florid visage of the Australian ox on the label looks down, not alto-

gether incongruously, from many such a rustic altar.

The attitude of the peasant's mind to his Lares is transparently clear; but what was that of the mind of a highly cultivated man like Tibullus, who belonged to a society which was rapidly ceasing to believe at all, even in the august Immortals? It might be difficult to find an analogy in Italy, but it can be easily found in Russia. The educated Russian who has travelled, feels the same for the family Icon as the Roman poet felt for the family Lares. He feels, in the first place, that this is an institution connected with the sacred ties of kinship and even with national life and sentiment; that such an institution is very touching and interesting and is much more worthy of encouragement than of contempt; that, for the rest, if there be a Power that hears, all aspirations and the peasant's humblest sacrifice will find their way to It—*sa prière sait plus longue que lui*; that, lastly, there is such a thing as Luck, and the Icon brings luck, never mind how. This point of view is sincere, within its limits quite as sincere as some graver assumptions of belief. It is, moreover, a matter of common observation that *Aberglaube* flourishes at the time when serious religious convictions are increasingly shaken.

It was to the paternal Lares, at whose feet he ran about as a child, that Tibullus's thoughts travelled

when he was starting to accompany his friend and captain, Messala, in the expedition between the Garonne and the "rapid Rhone." It was to them that he addressed the simple prayer to be preserved in the hour of battle. "Be it no shame," he said, "that you are fashioned out of an old trunk, for even so you inhabited the abode of my old grandfather. The men of those days kept better faith when a wooden idol stood in a small shrine and received poor offerings. The deity was propitiated if one gave it a libation from the new vintage or set a crown of corn-ears on its sacred head. Whoever had had his wishes fulfilled, carried offerings to the god with his own hand, followed by a little girl bearing fine honeycomb" (Kelly). If he escape, he too will honour the Lares; a pig shall be offered up to them, which he will follow clad in white and crowned with myrtle. And then he inveighs against the horrors and stupidity of war, with the open disgust of a man who could prove himself not only brave, but exceptionally valorous, on occasion. Let others make a boast of martial deeds: it is enough for him to listen, as he drinks, to the stories told by the garrulous old soldier, who traces his camp on the table with his finger dipped in red wine. What folly it is to seek death in war; is it not always near, approaching with noiseless feet? In the next lines we seem to hear not only the note of Tibullus's

sadness but the sigh of all antiquity at the gate of death: "There are no fields of harvest below, no cultivated vineyards, but fierce Cerberus and the Stygian ferry-boat. A pale crowd, with fleshless chaps and burnt hair, wander by the gloomy marsh."

How much to be preferred to military glory is the lot of the man who grows old in his cottage, with his children round him! He follows his sheep, his son looks after the lambs, and when he comes home tired, his wife prepares warm water to refresh him. "May such a lot be mine!" Tibullus had his prayers fulfilled so far that he escaped scatheless, and with no little glory, from the Aquitanian campaign, in which he served Messala as aide-de-camp, but the year after, when on his way to Asia with the same commander, he fell ill with a fever at Corfu, that undermined his once strong constitution. One of his most beautiful elegies was written when the fever was at its worst and he had almost abandoned hope. What had he done to merit death? He had hurt no one, nor had he spoken "mad blasphemies against the gods." His hair was black, and creeping age had not come upon him. Unlike many ancient poets, Tibullus did not hate old age; he had a tender wish to grow old and to relate the events of his youth to the young. He begs his friends to offer up sacrifices for his recovery, and

whether he lives or dies, at least to remember him.

Tibullus minutely describes the Ambarvalia or Spring Festival, when the fields were purified, a ceremony resembling the blessing of the field and of the beasts which is still in force under the religion whose Founder was born twenty-six years after this elegy was written. The rite, says Tibullus, had been handed down to them from the old time, and it was good and seemly to perform it. After the work of the year comes this solemn day of rest; it is a Sabbath for all, the furrows rest, the ploughman rests, the unharnessed oxen rest, with garlanded heads, before their full manger; the woman puts not her hand to the spindle. The holy lamb is led to the altar, followed by the folk wearing crowns of olive. The greater deities are then invoked, Bacchus with his grapes, Ceres with her corn-ears: "Gods of our native land, we purify our fields, we purify our hinds; repel, ye gods, all evils from our boundaries. Let not our crops cheat the labours of the harvest with deceitful blades nor the slow-footed lamb fear the swift wolves. Then the sleek rustic, cheered by the plenteousness of his fields, will heap large logs on the blazing hearth; and a crowd of born thralls, a good sign of a thriving farmer, will sport, and erect bowers of twigs before the altar."

Another interpretation of the words given here

as "bowers of twigs" is that they mean "baby-houses" made in play by the slave children of the house. Dark as is the blot of slavery upon ancient civilisation, one is always being reminded that the slaves (especially those who, like these children, were born on the estate) were well cared for, and, as a rule, kindly treated.

Tibullus praises the rural gods for having instructed men in all the arts of peace: how first to cover the little log-hut with thatch, how to break oxen for the plough, how to put wheels to the cart. And he praises the husbandman for having been the first civiliser, the first to graft the apple, to irrigate the garden, to press out the juices of the golden grape, even to invent the elements of music and poetry. It is well to notice how usually the ploughman, not the shepherd, is the central figure in the Latin poetry of the country; it was more bucolic than pastoral. Thus Tibullus points to the labourer as he who first sang rustic words in determinate measure to relieve him from the weariness of his long toil at the plough. It was the labourer, too, who began to compose airs to the oaten pipe in the rest-time after meals, which, on the proper days, he sang to the garlanded images of the gods. The Roman peasant is not here represented as piping to his divinities; but pipers were very early employed in the temples, perhaps soon after the introduction of the pipe from Asia. They

seem to have been also engaged to attend funerals; Augustus cut down the number that might be so employed to ten, and forbade the pipers to eat in the temples. This led to a sort of strike; the pipers left Rome in a body, but were brought back by a stratagem, which is related by Livy and Ovid. When they reappeared they were masked, to which Ovid ascribes the origin of people "wearing strange dresses and chanting merry sayings to old-fashioned airs on the Ides of June," practices suggestive of the Carnival. With regard to piping in the temples, it would be interesting to know whether the custom of the Abruzzi peasants of playing on fife and bagpipe before the shrines of the Madonna (as they used to do during the Christmas week at Rome) does not date back to some prae-Christian practice. These rude musicians have handed their art down from father to son from time immemorial, till it has become an instinct with them to throw a devotional meaning into their wild notes which even the human voice rarely succeeds in expressing.

Tibullus recalls how, of old, the villagers assembled once a year to sing the praise of Bacchus, when the leader of the best chorus or the best individual singer received a goat as a "not-to-be-despised reward." This tends to show that the "goat-prize" theory was the one in favour at that date to account for the word "tragedy."

In spite of his criticism of war, the poet had more than once a thought of returning to the camp, the only active life open to one who preserved a haughty detachment from the politics of the day, giving no word either of eulogy or blame to that head of the State whom his brother poets were saluting as divine. Sometimes, without doubt, a secret voice whispered to him that he was meant for a nobler part than that of pouring out upon worthless objects the treasures of a love which could not help forgiving. But the personal ambition or impersonal enthusiasm that might have spurred him to sustained action was lacking ; he knew his weakness perfectly ; he turned himself inside out and examined the contents with a half-contemptuous smile. In theory he always held to the same rule of life—to enjoy while you may, while there is time :

> Be merry ! See, the steeds of night advance,
> And yellow stars enweave their wanton dance ;
> After them, silent Sleep with sombre wings
> And dreams of dark, mysterious countenance.

But like the Persian poet, of whom he often reminds us, he knows only too well that a light heart is not to be had for the asking. Those dark dreams of his, which were probably a real experience, as he more than once alludes to them, cast their shadow over his most sunlit waking hours.

So we leave this Roman knight, taking a last look

at his handsome form as, in a simple dress, forestalling Tolstoi's Levine (and Tolstoi himself) by two thousand years, he followed the ploughing oxen, or turned up the soil with a fork, or carried home a strayed lamb in his bosom.

IX

OVID AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Intelligent children, who are always impressed by the vague terror and majesty of Scandinavian mythology, are seldom attracted by the more definite and circumscribed myths of Greece and Rome. They consider them wanting in seriousness, a grave defect to the childish mind. They put them aside as dead and cold. There are accomplished scholars who have given years of patient study to the elucidation of these myths and who yet end where the children end ; though they know the most minute details about the outward dress of Greek legends, the soul utterly escapes them. Not all the learning of the Schools can help so much to reveal the inner meaning of the ancient stories as a few summer days spent in a Greek island, where we sit among the asphodel and walk in glades of olives which ascend by solemn aisles from sea to mountain-top. There we may gain the comprehension which is not thought but feeling. Poets have sometimes gained it without

any such help by the light that is within them—the light of imagination. But the plain man who has not that gift cannot do better than to take his classics to the Mediterranean ; for instance, to Benizza, in the island of Corfu, the spot which to the present writer more than any spot till now visited in Hellas, or Sicily, or Magna Graecia, realised the youth of the world,

> . . . when God
> By man as godlike trod.

To be taught all that such a place can teach we must be alone. No human voice must break upon the silence, which is so complete that the chirp of an insect or the note of a bird seems to have the volume of a full orchestra. There we may read, or more wisely recall in our minds without reading, a book Latin in tongue but mainly Greek in inspiration, the *Metamorphoses* of Publius Ovidius Naso. And if the noonday sun give us the desire to sleep, our dreams will be peopled by a fairy masque of gracious living creatures : Daphne the laurel, Cadmus and Hermione the gentle snakes, Arachne the spider, Narcissus youth and flower, Progne the swallow, Cyane the fountain, Galatea the summer sea, Naiad and Dryad, dancing faun and flute-playing satyr, what are they but materialised impressions, the truth of which can never change ?

The primitive man did not seek to inquire into or

to explain natural phenomena, but to give a local habitation and a name to the emotions which those phenomena called forth in him. The great appearances and operations of Nature, the sun and moon, the progression of the seasons, the alternation of day and night, he associated with supernatural forces which could command him, but which he could not command, although he might in some measure propitiate them. For these he felt admiration deepening into fear. On the other hand, the innumerable and familiar manifestations of Nature with which he was brought into immediate contact inspired him with another sentiment, which may be summed up in the word fellowship. He was inclined to view life as a continual shaking up of being into new kaleidoscopic pictures, a general interchange of parts that present new forms while retaining their original elements. According to this theory, not only animals, but trees, flowers, rivers, rocks become pregnant with personality. Man did not cut himself adrift from the other species or from inanimate objects. He reached by intuition the idea of the unity of Nature, to which all modern science tends; only, as has been said, in developing that idea he depended not on reason but on emotion.

Nothing is more natural than that the primitive mind should have supposed a close kinship between all forms of life; but if we think over it, we shall

always see a kind of mystery in its inability to distinguish between life and no life, its unconsciousness of that ultimate gulf which seems so absolutely impassable to our average intelligence, and before which the hardiest man of science still stands doubting. This is a point on which backward races throw a great deal of light. A recent observer states, for instance, that to the Indian of South America "all objects, animate and inanimate, seem exactly of the same nature, except that they differ in the accident of bodily form." Again, it is quite sure that children are constantly lapsing into ignorance of the existence of any hard and fast line of division. A little girl may *know* that her doll does not feel, but she *believes* that it does feel; her knowledge resting on the assertions of persons whose word she is accustomed to accept, while her belief rests on an instinct, old as man, to think spirit or spiritual powers into matter. To the brief announcement of a child's death from burning during a very cold winter, the newspapers added, "She was warming her doll." Poor little martyr! I myself recollect the anguish exhibited by an Italian peasant child during an operation performed on her doll; to adjust an injured limb the scissors had to be used and at every snip the child, who was nevertheless trying to control her feelings, turned white as marble and uttered a stifled sob. What she thought I do not know, but she felt instinctively that

the doll was suffering pain. An identical instinct is at the bottom of all fetichism, image-worship and magic, whether black or white, in which matter is employed as a vehicle.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in a less degree his *Fasti* are valuable not only as story-books and poems, but as documents for the history of ideas. Ovid was a collector of traditions on a vast scale. He had an incomparable knowledge of legends, prejudices, customs, rites; if he embellished more than the Folk-lore Society would strictly approve, there is reason to think that he never invented. His own state of mind in reference to the stories he retold probably varied from that of the pious Catholic who relates the pretty tale of St. Francis and the wolf to that of the legend-loving sceptic who eagerly seizes on the fable of St. Martha and the Tarrasque. The former abstains from negation; he even wishes to believe and very likely he succeeds. The latter re-echoes Voltaire's regretful lines:

> On court, hélas! après la vérité;
> Ah! croyez-moi, l'erreur a son mérite.

Ovid wrote at a time when the mania for everything Greek had touched its high-water mark in Rome, and he was influenced by the prevailing taste, but even more, it may be guessed, by his own travels in Greece and Sicily, still an entirely Greek land, though a Roman conquest. He drank in the Greek spirit

at its source, a spirit partly, but never wholly, acclimatised among the people of Italy. When he was miserably languishing in exile he fondly looked back to his journeys over azure waves and to his sojourn in Sicily, not far from the twin springs, Anapus and Cyane: "Here a large portion of the passing year was spent by me. Alas! how unlike is that region to the Getic land!"

Ovid was almost morbidly affected by climate and natural surroundings. He had that nostalgia of the South from which Southern Italians, including those who are only partially educated, suffer severely when obliged to live even in the north of Italy. A cook from the south, who had gone to a place near Udine, wrote to me that he was going to leave his situation; he had nothing to complain of in his master and mistress, but the "paese" was "totally impossible to live in." It is not that their health generally suffers; they can bear the cold well; it is their spirits that give way. Ovid writes from Tomi (which was somewhere on the Black Sea) that he is sorry to have offended the inhabitants by what he has said about their country; they have been always kind and hospitable, but how can they expect him to praise their climate? It makes even health hateful to him; all the year round it is cold; spring brings no flowers, nor does summer see "the naked bodies of the reapers"; the soil yields chiefly wormwood;

there are no singing birds, except, perhaps, in the distant forest; what streams there are, are of brackish water.

Of his own birthplace, Sulmo, he preserved the tenderest memories. It was a small place, but healthy, with a wonderful wealth of running streams, which kept it fresh and green in the August heats. These rivulets were also used for artificial irrigation. Sulmo yielded corn, but the grape was its chief produce, the vines being supported by elms and trained in garlands from tree to tree in the manner that still gives all that district and the neighbourhood of Naples an air of superb luxuriance in the vintage season, the only right time for visiting the South of Italy. Ovid recommended an active interest in agriculture as the best "remedy for love." What healthier occupation for mind and body than to watch the ploughing and sowing, the goats on the rocks and the bees on the yews; or better still, to use the spade ourselves in planting the well-watered garden and the pruning knife in grafting fruit-trees? He may have played at grafting in his orchards near Rome, but in spite of his good advice, he leaves us suspecting that he was less of a practical agriculturist than a dreamer of dreams among the woods and brooks. We fancy him roving as a pensive boy to whom trees and flowers and all kinds of creatures told their secrets.

He was always putting himself into the place of plants and animals, and thinking how one would think in their position. This was evidently a habit of mind with him, not a mere storyteller's device. Probably he was quite young when he wrote the long poem expressive of the feelings of a walnut-tree, which has sometimes been supposed to be a veiled satire, but without any good reason. The unfortunate walnut-tree, growing as it does by the side of the road, sees its young fruit pelted with a hail-storm of stones by horrid boys, who use the nuts to play games, several of which Ovid describes. The tree is hurt by cruel wounds that mutilate its branches, and by injuries to its bark which leave the wood bare. Instead of having its fruit gathered in due season and stored by the thrifty wife of the husbandman, it beholds its produce scattered, unripe and worthless, on the ground. What business have people to inflict such treatment on a respectable tree which yields both fruit and shade?

In the *Treatise on Fishes*, said to have been written towards the end of his life at Tomi, Ovid points out that all animals have a vague dread of an unknown death, against which they defend themselves, if they are strong, by their superior strength; if they are weak, by expedients and stratagems such as that of the octopus of assuming the colour of the place where it lies. No one seems to have given

Ovid the credit of observing this habit of "protective coloration," on which Darwin and all recent naturalists place so much stress. With the same sympathetic penetration, he declares—and who will deny it?—that the horse that wins the race is perfectly aware of his victory. Does he not hold his head much higher than the others when he is led forth to receive the applause of the crowd?[1]

Ovid's love of animals is characteristically shown in his elegy on Corinna's parrot. Perhaps he wrote the elegy because Catullus had written a lament on Lesbia's sparrow, but we are almost persuaded that Ovid shed a real tear over the parrot, while one suspects that Catullus left the weeping to Lesbia. How affectionately he recalls its friendship with the turtle-dove; such a friendship exists at the present time between a parrot and a white pigeon dwelling at Sorrento. And how kindly the poet would believe, "if there is any believing in matters of doubt," that there is a blest abode for innocent feathered souls in the world beyond, where the parrot will make the birds wonder and admire by speaking human words. Here on earth what love can do for him has been done; "a grave as little as his body covers his bones."

The belief in an interchange of parts between

[1] A horse which ran in the riderless races once popular in Tuscany, always kicked its competitors when nearing the goal; by this means it won many races.

man and beast, whether by the regular process of the transmigration of souls, or by the violent one of the working of an arbitrary spell, must modify the thoughts, if not the conduct, of men in respect to animals. We know, as a matter of fact, that it does largely modify both thoughts and conduct. It does not make men always humane; but no one who held it would say that he may beat his donkey, *perchè non è cristiano*, "because it is not a human being," for that is the meaning of *cristiano* in the peasant speech of Italy. "Spare the snake, sir, it too has but one little life," said the Indian servant to his English master, who was attacking a cobra. Ovid, naturally pitiful, was quick to seize this point of view (though he might have drawn a line at cobras). He saw that arguments could be deduced from the doctrine of metamorphosis against animal sacrifices, for which he felt a strong repugnance. Some poets of the Greek *Anthology* touched lightly on the same subject; but Ovid returns to it persistently. We cannot help asking whether the Roman priesthood could have heard a fundamental institution of orthodoxy so openly attacked without becoming hostile to the raiser of such inconvenient questions.

If some blood must be spilt, Ovid would have the "idle swine" pay the cost. The sow rooted up the young corn with her snout and thus offended Ceres; the goat, also, had misbehaved by nibbling

the vine-tendrils. "But what didst thou, O ox, and what did ye, O gentle sheep, to deserve a like fate?" In another place Ovid partly throws the sheep overboard; a sheep, he says, was guilty of eating up the consecrated plants (rosemary, myrtle, tamarisk) which a good old woman had been accustomed to sacrifice to the rural deities. But he is faithful to the ox, the animal which should be held sacred by man, since it ploughs his fields. "Take the knife far from the ox; a neck fitted for the yoke ought not to be smitten by the axe. Let him live, and many a time may he labour on the hard soil."

In the last book of the *Metamorphoses* Pythagoras is made to ask, "How can you kill for food the lowing calf, or the kid that cries like a child, or the bird that has fed out of your hand?" This plea is one of simple humanity, but the philosopher reinforces it by urging that in the body of any slain beast may have dwelt the soul of your father, your brother, or, at least, of man. Ovid is delighted to be able to bring a character on the scene who can argue thus. We are not told, however, that Sulmo's poet was a vegetarian. Was he then insincere? Not more so than we all are to-day or to-morrow. In our dual lives our real self lives rather in what we feel and do not, than in what we do and feel not.

The prettiest episode in the pretty story of

"Philemon and Baucis" was certainly an embellishment due to Ovid's tender heart. The story itself, though its origin has never been traced, was no doubt traditional; it is a variant of the class that deals with receiving divine visitors unawares, a class as old as Homer and as modern as the beautiful mediaeval legends in which the visitor is Christ. In the light of a description of humble life, "Philemon and Baucis" is not to be surpassed; it will bear to be told once again.

Jupiter and Mercury in the shape of men craved admittance at a thousand doors, but every one was bolted against them. Then they came to a very small cottage, thatched with straw and reeds. A pious old woman and her old husband had lived here since first in youth they were united, and made their poverty light by sharing it. It was the same thing if you asked for masters or servants; the whole household was but two. When the heavenly guests knocked at this door they were made kindly welcome. Baucis, the old wife, kindled the embers, and set a pipkin on the fire full of herbs from their carefully watered garden; her husband meanwhile cut off a little piece from the rusty side of bacon which hung from the beam. Warm water was offered to the guests to refresh their limbs, and a couch was spread with those coarse cloths which were yet kept "for best" and generally stowed away. Baucis busied

about the house as fast as her trembling old body would go ; she steadied the broken leg of the table by putting a potsherd under it, and then began to place the repast before the guests. For *gustatio* or *hors-d'œuvres*, fragrant wild berries, radishes, curdled milk and eggs cooked in the embers (the *uova sudate* of the Lombard peasant) ; for *pièce de résistance*, bacon and boiled herbs ; for dessert, dried figs, nuts, dates, plums, apples, grapes, and white honeycomb. Each course was served with welcoming looks which told of no lurking niggard feeling or indifference.

The wine, too, had been poured out and the old couple remarked that the goblet into which they poured it refilled of itself as soon as it was emptied. When this had happened once or twice, they began to feel (especially Philemon) frightened out of their wits. The modesty of the unprepared entertainment they had given to visitors who could cause such a singular occurrence dismayed them to the last degree, and by a simultaneous impulse they ran in search of the single goose that guarded their cottage. But their legs were slow with age and its wings were swift, and, after a keen pursuit, the bird flew straight towards the Immortals, who commanded that it should be spared. So Ovid made a present to Jove of the kindliest trait ever recorded of him.

The gods led their humble friends up a safe hill, and then submerged the inhospitable village, sparing

only their cottage, which was transformed into a beautiful temple. When the old couple were asked what boon they desired, they replied that they only wished to serve their divine guests as priests in the temple while they lived, and when their hour came, to die together. So it was ; for, after a long life, as one turned into an oak the other became a lime tree, and they had no pain of parting, neither did one look upon the other's tomb. How much truer and more touching is this conclusion than that which an inferior storyteller would have resorted to, and which actually figures in some modern versions of the story, namely, the transformation of Philemon and Baucis into young people !

Anecdotes of humble but generous hospitality were once so popular because such incidents were within the experience of every traveller. Even now it is not needful to go far from the beaten track in order to match the old stories with new ones. If you have been talking to a Montenegrin peasant by the wayside, he will probably ask you, with his grand air, to step into his house to take coffee, and in Greece there is hardly a cottage where the stranger would not be made welcome. Indeed, the ill-luck of the gods in meeting with closed doors is rather surprising. The same thing once happened to me, though through nobody's fault. A friend and I were benighted on the Col di Barranca ; between one and

two o'clock in the morning our light failed and we knocked at every building we could discern in the almost complete darkness with the hope of getting it renewed. I cannot forget the dreary effect of receiving no response. It was in the late autumn, and these buildings, occupied by herdsmen in summer, were one and all deserted.

Resembling the story of Philemon and Baucis in some respects, but varied with delicate art, is Ovid's telling of the peasant hospitality given to Ceres during her search for Proserpine. Ovid treated the legend of Proserpine twice at considerable length; in the *Fasti* and afterwards, with greater skill, in the *Metamorphoses*. The most romantic of all classic myths, it attracted him by its appeal to human sympathies, its swift movement, and its picturesqueness. What scene ever made so charming a picture as that of Proserpine and her girl companions in the meads of Enna? The Greek genius which invented so many things, invented the type of joyous, healthy, active girlhood, fearless and fancy free, which nearly went out of the world till it came back with Shakespeare. Ovid could see the beauty of that type, and his maidens hurry and scurry in their innocent sport, full of true life and careless rapture; this one plucking marigolds, that one wild hyacinths, others amaranth and thyme and rosemary and many a nameless flower, while she, the fairest, gathers the

fragile crocus and white lilies. Girls and flowers, which are most a part of Nature?

Ceres, after she misses Proserpine, goes through the whole island asking if any one has seen a girl passing. When it gets dark, she crosses over to Greece and lands at Eleusis, the name of which, meaning "an arrival," still recalls her coming. There lie the ruins of the temple where her mysteries were celebrated, to the eye some of the least striking remains in Greece, but powerfully suggestive to the mind. The inverted torches on the broken columns tell us of those with which the goddess lighted herself through that night journey. Eleusis, then, according to Ovid, was nothing but the farm of the old man Celeus, who, in the Greek version, was a king; but Ovid understood that poetic effect would gain by giving him a humble station.

Ceres meets this old peasant, who is carrying home acorns and blackberries and dry logs to feed his fire. His little daughter drives two goats down the mountain side. At home his baby lies sick in the cradle. The little girl asks the goddess, who has assumed the form of an old woman, "What are you doing here, mother, all alone in the hills?" How the word "mother" pierces her heart! The old man begs her to rest under his poor roof; at first she refuses; then she yields to his prayer. "How much happier are you than I, who have lost my

daughter!" she says. But she discovers that her good old host has also his troubles; the house is in mourning, his little son now lies past hope of recovery. Then the divine visitor kisses the child on its mouth, and the colour comes back to the white cheeks and strength to the wasted body. All the household rejoices, father, mother, and little sister, for they are all the household.

The tale of the commonest grief and gladness was never more feelingly told.

A good deal may be gleaned from Ovid's works about rural ceremonies and beliefs which were peculiar to Italy. On the Calends of May fell the festival of Pales, goddess of the shepherds, who was unknown in Greece. One of the customs connected with it was the time-honoured and long-surviving rite of jumping over or through the fire. The sheep-folds were garlanded; a fire made of rosemary, pitch-tree, laurel, and Sabine herbs brightly cackled on the hearth, millet cakes and warm milk are offered to Pales, who is begged to protect the cattle and those that tend them; to pardon trespasses and short-comings; to mediate with the higher powers; to drive away disease from men and flocks and from the dogs also, and to give plenty through the year.

Another peculiarly Latin folk-worship was that of the Lares. The Greeks who, at least in towns, did little more than sleep at home, could not have

entered into the intense Roman sentiment of the hearth. In Ovid's time the Lares became established and endowed ; he says that there were a thousand at the street corners in Rome, where Augustus had set them up in company with his own genius, appointing a body of priests to look after their worship. His encouragement of this domestic and hitherto purely popular superstition is characteristic of his policy in religious matters. The Lares held their own at the Crossways till they were rather succeeded than ousted by Christian saints. Ovid mentions that the original Lares were represented with a dog, the typical house-guardian, at their feet ; and he makes the observation that " Crossways are dear to dogs as well as to deities."

Again, the *Fête des Morts* was an essentially Roman observance. Ovid will not condemn costly offerings to the dead, but it is plain that he prefers the little simple, rustic gifts of faithful love :

> C'est l'offrande des moindres choses
> Qui recèle le plus d'amour.

A wreath laid upon the tomb, scattered fruits, a few grains of salt, corn soaked in wine, and the earliest violets, with these the dead are content. It is said, remarks Ovid, that departed forefathers have been known to revenge themselves in a disagreeable way for neglect on the part of their ungrateful descendants, but upon that he expresses his own incredulity.

It is his way to pick and choose between what to accept and what to reject of the traditional lore of which he had so vast a knowledge. He shrinks from the idea of human sacrifice, and he therefore will not accept it as accounting for the curious Roman custom of throwing thirty images of old men stuffed with rushes into the Tiber. The act was performed by the Vestal Virgin from the Sublician bridge. Ovid would refer it to the wish of some wholly imaginary Greeks to have their bodies committed to the Tiber, so that its stream might bear them homewards. Thus, in the Middle Ages the dwellers on the Rhone placed their unattended dead in the river, which bore them to the sacred Alyscamp. In spite, however, of this confirmation of the possible correctness of Ovid's theory, there is very little doubt that the Roman old men had a sacrificial significance. They probably belonged to the family of puppets still, here and there, devoted to fiery or watery elements (as the North Italian *Vecchia* of Mid-Lent), all of which are remotely reminiscent of immensely ancient rites of propitiation to the genius either of growth or of fruition.

X

THE ROMAN'S VILLEGGIATURA

The summer palace of some Oriental king should be considered, perhaps, the first villa: such a palace as the Generalife must have been, in the days of its splendour, a dream of fair women, bulbuls, and roses. But in the more modest though still delightful modern sense, the country pleasure-house is a distinctly Roman invention. The villa of the private citizen could not have become an institution anywhere unless good and secure roads made access to it easy. This condition was fulfilled under the Roman government to an extent which must seem surprising when we think of the frequent civil convulsions which flooded Italy with dispossessed peasants and disbanded soldiers. The roads were generally safe and almost always good. It was not dangerous to live in an isolated house, though no doubt it was common to have not less than two or three families of free peasants or slaves either lodged in a wing of the master's dwelling or close by it. Thus the villa

became possible, but it was the idiosyncrasy of the race that caused it to develop into an established feature of Roman life. The Greek would never have been able to understand the Roman citizen's need of rural retirement.

It was probably well back in republican times that the Roman began to look upon a house out of town as rather a necessity than a luxury. As wealth increased and with it restlessness, the custom of having two or three houses became more and more general. Lucretius describes, with his fine irony, the man of fashion who, terribly bored in his splendid town mansion, sets off suddenly for his villa as if it were on fire and he going to put it out; but when he arrives there he begins at once to yawn or goes to sleep, or even re-orders the horses and returns in an equal hurry to the city. By the Augustan age the two or three villas had grown to be five or six in the case of rich and fashionable people, and they were often as elaborate in their appointments as the house in town. In other instances they preserved most of the original simplicity of the farm-house. Horace, for his own time, and Martial and Pliny the Younger, for the later period of Trajan, give us abundant information about both kinds of Roman *villeggiatura*.

If Virgil remained always a man of the country, in spite of living mostly in cities, no amount of country life could make Horace other than a man-

about-town. When he speaks of the country it is not as Virgil or as Tibullus spoke of it; he knows nothing of Nature's mysteries, nothing of the eternal sentiment of the field-tilling, nothing of the religion of the plough. He is not one of the initiated, but he enjoys and, within his limitations, he appreciates. The country is good for his health and for his appetite. It gives him a rest from the hundred thousand requests and questions with which he is importuned as he walks the streets of Rome. The friend of Maecenas is supposed to be able to arrange any little affair, to know all the news before it is divulged; in vain he pleads inability or ignorance. It was all very flattering, and Horace is the last person not to be flattered by it, but too much of it becomes tedious. The whole day goes by frittered away in trifles, and on such days he ardently desires his rural retreat where sleep and leisure and the Greek poets fill up the tranquil hours and the evening brings a supper fit for the gods—beans and bacon, washed down by wholesome wine, which costs nothing since it is made on the estate. A friend or two, staying in the house, enliven the board, but the discourse does not run on other people's houses, or on somebody's dancing; serious themes are discussed, such as the nature of good, and what constitutes true happiness; till, for a break, an old neighbour tells the story of "The Town and Country Mouse," or

some other ever-young ancient tale. When Maecenas was going to dine with him, Horace told him he must not expect Falernian or Formian vintages; there would be only the humble Sabian wine which he had sealed up in a Grecian cask with his own hands, in commemoration of some popular triumph of the illustrious friend to whose generosity he owed the estate where it was grown.

The poet preferred the rusticity of the Sabine farm to the Rome-out-of-town life at Tibur, where he also had a villa. Tibur in the season provided more society than the capital itself; people ran to and fro between the houses of acquaintances as they do between the villas on the Lake of Como. In the Sabine valley the real business of the country occupied every one around, if not altogether the poet. In one ode he laments that there will be soon no real country; mansions and parks and ornamental waters replace simple cottages like his own "white country-box"; banks of myrtle and violets encroach on the olive groves; the elms, which supported the vines, are cut down to plant plane-trees or shady laurel-walks; ploughed fields disappear in lawns. In this ode it is by chance mentioned that the Romans then liked to build their houses facing north, the contrary to the present preference. "Chi paga per il sole non paga per il dottore" is a proverb which shows the faith put in a sunny aspect by the Romans of

to-day. Horace regrets the time when stately public buildings were raised, but each man was content with a poor place for his personal habitation. But the Italian private citizen was already the greatest lover and builder of palaces in the world out of Persia.

Horace was in all things the poet of moderation (the only one). He could honestly disclaim earth-hunger, and declare that he never went round his fields longing to make crooked boundaries straight by adding a bit here and enclosing an angle there. Perhaps the fact proves him an amateur; was there ever a man really bred to possess land who was quite free from this form of madness? Of his father's farm in Apulia he seems to have preserved no pleasant childish memories; he remembers how poor the soil was, and he never expresses pain that it went the common way of confiscation. His father, a freedman, eked out his livelihood as a tax-gatherer; it must have strained his every resource to send his son, well provided for, to be educated in Rome instead of placing him in a provincial grammar school, as most of his richer neighbours did with their sons.

Yet Horace knew the charm that comes from possession; the charm of saying "my own fields, my own oxen." He loved the Sabine farm for every reason, but most of all because it belonged to him. He loves it so well that he trembles sometimes lest

he should lose it, but he is consoled by the reflection that surely no evil eye will be cast upon so modest a domain. The estate lay under Mount Lucretilis, about thirty miles from Rome, in a valley which is easily identified, and which used to be visited by so many English pilgrims that the peasants were long convinced that Horace was an Englishman. The poet had five families of free husbandmen and eight house-slaves. The homestead was managed by a steward or *fattore*, who gave his master plenty of trouble. He had been a slave in Rome, fed on rations, and hard worked, but instead of rejoicing at his improved position, he pined for the tavern and music-hall, and neglected the oxen and let the sluices overflow.

All his life Horace had wished for a piece of land which contained a garden, a stream, and a coppice, and in the Sabine valley he found all three. To take a nap, after his brief meal, on the grass by the stream was to him that exquisite combination of mental and physical ease which man is foolish to despise because it is an enjoyment within the reach of every other animal as well as of himself. He clearly considered both his Sabine farm and his villa at Tibur healthier than the capital, especially in the autumn, "when every father and mother turns pale with fear for their children"; it may be doubted if Rome was so exempt from malarial fever at that

time as it is generally thought to have been, or that it was ever so free from it as it is now. Once, when he had promised Maecenas to be away only five days, Horace remained at Tibur through all the month of August, and he begs his "dear friend," if he would have him keep well, to let him stay yet longer and even pass the winter out of Rome by the seaside (he was probably thinking of Tarentum).

Yet was not there a spice of truth in the taunt which his servant Davus addressed to the poet, that when he had been too long in the country he grew moped to death? We are almost invited to suspect that there was; the town was, after all, the life of his life. One may be sure, by the by, that the worthy Davus himself hated seclusion as much as any Italian servant does to-day. Tibur he may have endured; there he could *far conversazione* with the servants of other villas, but at the Sabine farm with whom could he have *due chiacchiere* except with the steward — another martyr? By immortalising the amusing criticism of Davus, Horace shows that he was the first to observe that "no man was a hero to his valet."

In the story of Alphius the Usurer, who resolved to turn countryman, but ended by trying to put out on the Calends the money he had gathered in on the Ides, we see a man who, whatever his education, has a most superior power of appreciating the attractions

of the country. The picture he gives of them is the best known, the most popular that exists ; even now, when the habit of Latin quotations is gone, few orators can get through a speech on a rural subject without the lines :

> Beatus ille, qui procul negotiis,
> Ut prisca gens mortalium,
> Paterna rura bobus exercet suis,
> Solutus omni faenore, etc.

When it comes to the point, however, of abandoning the "something he does in the City," he will never find the courage to consummate the sacrifice. We all know Alphius ; how he looks at every advertisement in the paper of "a desirable Elizabethan residence with grass land sufficient for three cows" ; how he corresponds with the advertiser and even goes regularly to examine eligible freeholds ; and we know that he will die as he has lived in the umbrageous recesses of his back office. There are people who go through their whole lives nursing and cockering an ambition which is not insincere, but is completely unreal. It forms the recreation of their dull hours, the romance soaring above their sordid pursuits ; it is dressed up to look so exactly as if it were alive that only a man's most intimate friends are aware that he would be alarmed and distressed beyond words if he were to-morrow called upon to turn it from fiction into fact.

The vine-tendrils hanging from tree to tree, the lowing cattle, the honey in the comb, the sheep yielding their thick fleeces to the shearer, the gliding waters, the warbling birds, the holy and healthy sun-tanned peasant bride, who piles up the logs for her tired husband's return and milks cows and sets out the evening meal of lamb or kid with olives, mallows, and a jar of wine — who observed them more lovingly than Alphius the Usurer? And sweet it is, he adds, while he sups, to watch the sheep hastening home to the fold and the weary oxen dragging from the fields the inverted ploughshare. Very sweet, no doubt, but to-morrow he will be back at money-lending.

Horace made only one real study of a husbandman, but it is remarkable for original insight. With few but sure touches he fixes the type of the peasant who, after all, has the best right to represent his class; a type far removed from the open-mouthed yokel to be so well described by Calpurnius, who would not have missed the show in the Arena for all the kine of Lucania. The Ofellus of Horace has a profound contempt for the luxuries of great cities. His predominating quality is a serious patience; his single passion is thrift. He is the peasant who paid the French war indemnity out of his savings; the rustic of whom Euripides wrote:

No showy speaker, but a plain, brave man,
Who seldom visited the town or courts ;[1]
A yeoman, one of those who save a land,
Shrewd, one whose acts with his professions squared ;
Untainted, and a blameless life he led.

Ofellus is not, like Melibaeus, consumed by helpless rage at injustice which he cannot fight against. He has realised the fact that man may command his conduct, not his circumstances, and having acquired this knowledge, he lets the learning of the Schools alone. It is a fact that Nature herself is constantly repeating to the tillers of the soil ; they live with her in a primitive relationship which allows no artificial screen to hide her might and their impotence. A fatalist at heart, Ofellus rises superior to fate. Wealth could give him nothing he cares to have, and he has the sense to see (in which he departs, somewhat, from his modern brother) that wealth is an entirely idle word except in so far as it stands for what it can give. When he owned the land which he now cultivates for the spendthrift soldier who turned him out, he and his children lived no more luxuriously than they do now. No meat was eaten in the house on work-days except a piece of smoked bacon, served with pot-herbs. If a friend came to see him, why, he prepared a reasonable feast, for he was no miser ; but a chicken or a

[1] The Italian peasant will say when he wishes to impress you with his respectability : "I was never in a law-court *even as a witness*."

kid, with figs and grapes and his own pure wine (of which a libation was duly offered to Ceres), made up the bill of fare—not turbot or oysters brought at a ruinous expense from Rome. Now that he and his sons work for hire, their labour places them above want and permits them to lead much the same life as before. Fortune can hurt him no more, while she may easily hurt the spoiler by robbing him of his ill-acquired acres; nay, who knows (though Horace does not say so) that Ofellus will not again become the owner of his land if he save long enough while the other wastes?

This contribution to the long tale of confiscation is characteristic of the poet who at the age of twenty-five (when the satire was written) looked on life already with a calm, unemotional eye, strictly resolved to walk round windmills, not to charge them. His was the wit of a contented heart, as Heine's was the wit of a broken heart. He had not eaten his bread with sorrow, and he did not know the heavenly powers, but what he did know of life and Nature he could express with a felicity that left little more to be said. Horace's feeling for the country had no depths or heights; it is the feeling of every Roman, from the senator to the tradesman, from the consul to the money-lender.

The commonness of the taste rendered it a

sort of bond of union between all classes. How deeply it was ingrained is proved by its continued existence under conditions not, on the face of things, favourable to it. The increasing mania for sensational and often bloodthirsty spectacles, and the still more ominous increase of unbridled self-indulgence, would seem incompatible with the enjoyment of the country ; yet Martial, who wrote when the vines of Vesuvius were freshly covered with ashes, makes us feel that rural scenes and life were as much appreciated as ever. It is true that he somewhere hints that the master may carry corruption among his dependants, as the French *seigneur* was accused of doing among his vassals ; an idea which would have repelled Horace, who always dwelt on the pure morality of the peasantry. There are, however, several rural descriptions in his *Epigrams* that are wholly pure and bright. We gather that, Spaniard though he was, he took a sound Roman interest in agriculture. He viewed it from the farmer's point of view, which, then as now, was not invariably exhilarating. Martial complains of over-cheapness ; the husbandman was left to feed on his own produce, and as there was more than he could eat, much lay running to waste. There were places where wine sold for less than water; corn, depreciated by the Egyptian trade as it is now by importations from America and India, sold for 8d. a bushel. Even

when the harvest was abundant, the cultivator made next to nothing.

But in spite of discouraging statistics, farming was a pleasant occupation for the proprietor who was a little of a capitalist. There is a secret satisfaction in being your own provision merchant. What a fool is a man like Apollinaris, exclaims Martial, "who has a lovely country-seat and never goes near it," leaving the bailiffs and caretakers to fatten on the riches of the rare fish-ponds and all the other plenty! Martial himself proposed to give a country banquet composed of lettuces and leeks, eggs cut in slices, cabbage, chicken, and a ham which has already appeared three times at table. If any one should scorn the *menu*, let him, after an uninterrupted spell of town-life, go straight to a very homely farm-house, by preference belonging to him. How excellent he will think his first meal. He will say that everything tastes alike in towns, while this dish of eggs and bacon, cooked over a wood fire, has a flavour denied to the French *chef's* "faisans de Bohème, sauce Périgueux." The illusion may not last long, but as long as it lasts it is complete. Martial laughs at his friend Bassus, who plays pretty at farming and owns a vast town-house out of town where nothing is to be had. Poultry, vegetables, and fruit are all brought from the city, and the garden, full of laurels, will certainly never put temptation in the way of the

local pilferer. With this gorgeous mansion he contrasts Faustinus' real rural homestead at Baiae. There you will not see a park laid out with groves of myrtle, plane-trees, and clipped box-hedges. Utility reigns supreme, but it is that utility which charms. Close-pressed heaps of corn fill every corner, and the wine-casks are put out to air, smelling strongly of the old vintage. Hither, in the late autumn, the rough vine-dresser brings the ripe grapes. From the valleys comes a sound of the bellowing bulls. The farmyard muster roams at large—cocks and hens, geese and peacocks, even pheasants and partridges, which seem to have been reared at home ; the turrets are loud with pigeons ; the pigs run after the steward's wife ; the lamb bleats as it follows its mother. "Young house-bred slaves, sleek as milk, surround the fire." The steward does not go idling about or playing games; his amusements are useful—he fishes, or nets birds, or goes a-hunting. When work is over, friends and neighbours look in and partake of a cordial but informal hospitality ; there is enough and to spare for all. The cheerful-faced rustic comes to pay his respects, nor does he come empty-handed ; he carries white honey, or conical cheeses, while tall girls, daughters of honest husbandmen, bring their mothers' offerings in osier baskets. These were presents, not tributes. There was slavery, not serfdom. The free peasant might be dispossessed by

the State, but he was not browbeaten, still less was he knouted by the lord of the manor.

We think of the little gifts of the English villagers to a popular squire, or, rather, to his wife—the gleaning-cake, the basket of damsons, the guinea-fowls' eggs, the elderberry wine, not to speak of pen-wipers, kettle-holders, and mysterious card-trays made of cloves and acorns. The giver understands almost as well as the receiver that the gift is valueless in itself, but valuable as a piece of symbolism. And what it symbolises is not subjection but freedom; the right of the freeborn freely to manifest their goodwill.

If the rustic offerings spoken of by Martial mark one kindly custom, another is revealed by the dropping in of neighbours to share the evening meal. We must suppose that Faustinus was a rich and well-educated Roman, yet, like Horace before him, he welcomed the society of his provincial neighbours; he could doubtless "talk of veals," as Dr. Johnson recommended a curate to learn to do, the young man having complained that in his part of the country calves (which were there called "veals") formed the staple conversation. Apart from common interests, there was then in Italy, as there is now, a sort of mental unity between all classes, an intellectual common ground independent of position or education.

"Of all the nations of Europe," wrote Charles

Lever in 1864, "I know of none, save Italy, in which the characters are the same in every class and gradation. The appeal you would make to the Italian noble must be the same you would address to the humble peasant on his property. The point of view is invariably identical; the sympathies are always alike. . . . To this trait, of whose existence Cavour well knew, was owing the marvellous unanimity in the nation on the last war with Austria. The appeal to the prince could be addressed and was addressed to the peasant. There was not an argument that spoke to the one which was not re-echoed in the heart of the other. In fact, the chain that binds the social condition of Italy is shorter than elsewhere, and the extreme links are less remote from each other than with most nations of Europe."

It is impossible to speak of the Roman villa without mentioning the name of Martial's benefactor, Pliny the Younger, to whom we owe such full and glowing accounts of his various country-houses, that some homeless *letterato* once spitefully said that he gave the idea of an auctioneer anxious to dispose of the property. Pliny has a formal right to figure among Roman poets, though we possess none of the verses which his wife sang so sweetly (the wise woman; no wonder that he adored her). They were sung at Rome, too, and even at Athens, which pleased the author, who confesses that he also hummed them

to himself now and then, which perhaps means rather frequently. One would like to hear the music of the drawing-room ballad of the Roman world. Pliny does not explain who wrote it; it may have been the rule, as in Elizabethan times, to write verses for well-known airs so that every one could sing them. He speaks modestly about his poems, but it is certain that he cherished a carefully watered little hope of their pleasing posterity. It is probably well for his fame that we are excused from passing judgment on them; he was too good an orator to be a good poet. Montaigne could forgive Cicero for writing verses, but not for publishing them. Still, this literary employment of the leisure of eminent Romans is always interesting to remember.

Poet or no poet, he is the very prince of eulogists of the country-house. It was the beginning and the end of his dearest pleasures, the port whence he started, the haven to which he returned. Wherever he was, his thoughts wandered to his father's mansion at the end of the lofty avenue in a suburb of Como —"Your delight and mine," as he calls it in a letter to Canerius Rufus. It is well worth remarking how from his earliest youth this Italian gentleman was deeply impressed with the duty of the cultured and well-off resident in a country town or rural village to make its interests his own, to endeavour to benefit his local neighbours, both the poor and those of a

higher but yet not affluent class. His first essays at the bar were made in pleading the suits of the people of Tifernum-on-Tiber (his mother's place), with whom he had been a great favourite in his boyhood. When honours and comparative wealth came with his appointment as Consul he thought immediately of building a temple for them at his own expense, "not to be outdone in affection"; and on its completion he took a long journey to be present when it was consecrated. At Como he founded a school, so that the fathers of families might not be obliged to send their sons to Milan to be educated, and he sought the help of Tacitus for finding good masters. He was always encouraging his father-in-law, who was a munificent giver, in works of public utility. That he was kind to his dependants is shown by many traits; he could well apply to himself Homer's line, "He had a father's gentleness for his people." When his slaves died he wept; his only consolation was that he had enfranchised them so that they died free. He sent his servant Zosimus, who was threatened with consumption, to pass the winter in Egypt, and on his return, better but not well, he arranged for him to go to a place in the south of France, where he might try the milk-cure. He gave a farm worth £800 to his old nurse.

In addition to his inherited palace, Pliny built two villas on the lake of Como—one higher up, which he

called the "Tragedy," from which you could see the lateen sails of the fishing-boats skimming the lake at dawn; the other, "Comedy," on the extreme edge of the shore, so that one could fish from one's bed.[1] The Como property had the ineffable charm of early associations; it afforded fishing, hunting, and boating, and its sweet tranquillity invited study; but Pliny's most enviable country-seats were at Laurentum and in the Tuscan Apennines. In addition to these he had a *pied-à-terre* at Tusculum and villas at Tibur and Praeneste. Still he did not pass for a millionaire. The house in Tuscany was built in an amphitheatre of mountains, covered with ancient trees and skirted by a belt of precious vineyards, below which, again, were pastures. The land abounded in song-birds, flowers, and springs of fresh water. Here the house was turned to the south; from the *loggia* you saw on one side large and fruitful fields, on the other well-kept lawns, roses from Tarentum, Pompeian fig-trees, and whatever Italy could provide of best. In a cool court a perpetual jet of water freshened the air. A friend wrote to Pliny to dissuade him from going to his Tuscan estate in summer, as he thought that it must be unhealthy; Pliny answered that, although the coast (the Maremma) is not only unhealthy but pestilential, there was no fear of illness in his high

[1] The intermittent fountain, about which he was so curious, still rises near what is called (but without historical warrant) the "Villa Pliniana."

valley, where people attained great ages and all seasons were delightful. The spring, perhaps, was the most perfect time ; but there was no great heat in summer, and the rather sharp winters could be borne, as the house was artificially heated as well as being full of sun. Of course hot and cold baths on the most approved system were ready at all hours. The reception rooms were arranged to afford the greatest variety of view ; one of them was decorated in the Pompeian style, with a marble dado surmounted by wall-paintings of trees and birds. Out of doors tennis and riding gave the needful exercise. Pliny was more proud of the riding-ground than of any other thing connected with the villa ; it was surrounded by old plane-trees, linked together with festoons of ivy. At its extreme end it formed a semicircle, cypresses taking the place of the plane-trees, and inside these was a hedge of roses.

Laurentum was in Pliny's time the Brighton or Newport of Rome. It was approached by two pleasant roads, passing through dense woods or broad, open spaces, enlivened by horses, sheep, and oxen, as the Campagna is now. The distance was not too great for you to run down after finishing your day's business in the capital. Scipio once picked up shells along that shore as an ease from public cares.

Pliny's house at Laurentum was what he called

unpretentious, but comfort had been most carefully studied, and even the servants' rooms were so neat that guests might have occupied them. The villa was flooded with air and light; it was all doors and windows. A glazed gallery led from the courtyard to the dining-room; behind were woods and mountains; in front, the Mediterranean. There was a tower with a splendid view. Pliny often had his dinner carried up to this tower, just as in the Apennines he would dine, seated on a marble seat, beside the marble basin of clear water at the end of his garden. What a delicate pleasure in life is shown by the little fact of these wandering meals. I knew a Lombard nobleman who had the same fancy; he even once gave a dinner-party in a boat moored in front of his villa on the lake of Garda.

Chosen books to read and re-read stocked the shelves of Pliny's seaside library, and here, too, there was a tennis-court as well as a magnificent swimming-bath. Like all Romans of that date, Pliny had a passion for collecting, but he did not put his most valuable treasures in the Laurentine house, which he wished to keep "modest and simple." One of his best "finds," a Corinthian brass statue of an old man, he sent to the Temple of Jupiter, desiring only that his name and titles should be inscribed on the pedestal. A modern donor would not accompany the gift by that request, but, perhaps,

he would be exceedingly disappointed if the thing asked for were left undone.

Hadrian's "villa," near Tivoli, which was seven miles round, and Diocletian's "retreat," the ruins of which form the town of Spalato, show the Roman taste for the country run wild and grown monstrous. After the Empire fell, for a while terror and insecurity drove men to stay in towns when they could not build for themselves fortified castles, the antithesis of the villa. But with the first opportunity the old love reappeared. In other countries the castle gave birth to the exclusive country-seat where the great noble lived as a king. The town-house, if there was one, was a secondary affair; often there was none, as is the case to this day in Austria and Hungary. In Italy, on the other hand, there was a reversion to the Roman arrangement; the house in the city was the most important, but it was supplemented by more or less numerous, more or less splendid, villas. Not to have two houses was destitution. Hence the crown of villas around any characteristically Italian town; Brescia, or Vicenza, or Trento. The untravelled Italian looks in amazement at the well-to-do Englishman who admits that he has only one home. An Italian "person of quality," who was obliged for the sake of economy to spend all the year at his villa, might complain as Browning makes him complain; but

were he forced to pass twelve months in the vaunted city square there would possibly be suicide instead of sighs. This time the poet, who dived deep in the Italian mind, only brings to the surface half a truth.

XI

NATURE IN THE LAST LATIN POETS

The century of the first Christian and the last pagan Caesar witnessed a truce of God between the old order and the new—a truce not always kept. The masses were loth to keep it, but among educated men the principle of tolerance found wider acceptance than in any other time till our own. Congenial spirits joined in intellectual marriage, at whichever altar they worshipped. Equality was more advanced socially than politically, reversing what usually happens, for in general people persuade themselves to give their religious opponents the right to exist long before they are ready to ask them to dinner. Such a period favoured the cultivation of poetry, though not the growth of a great poetry ; it produced elaboration rather than strength, scholarship rather than originality, art for art's sake rather than art as the irrepressible expression of a nation's manhood. The one great piece of literature that bears the date of the fourth century was not poetry, but prose; it is the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

The poets of that period were impelled to write about Nature—a neutral theme on which they could all alike write, but what they wrote is often spoilt by conceit or formalism. Sometimes, however, through the husk of conventionality we catch glimpses of the great undiscovered treasure of modern sentiment. The poet-professor of Bordeaux, Ausonius, describes scenery in his charming poem on the river Moselle, very much as a modern writer with a gift for word-painting would describe it. He renews the golden hours when we made the excursion from imperial Treves. As we read his enthusiastic verses we actually breathe once more the elastic air and see the swift-rushing waters coursing before us; we pass the noble cities, the smiling villas, the woods and richly cultivated slopes; we hear the gay throng of vine-dressers calling to one another, and the river boatmen singing mocking songs to the country-folk who return home along the banks in the late evening. The river abounded in fish, whose pretty sports were described affectionately by Ausonius — not, alas! without a cannibalistic relish, for he was very fond of good living. Where can we find a more vivid word-picture of the magical effects of reflections than in the following passage?

The blue depths give back the river's wooded banks, the waters seem full of leaves and the stream planted with vines. When the evening star lengthens out the shadows and casts

the verdant hillside on the breast of the Moselle, what glowing hues tinge the quivering surface! All the slopes swim in the ripples which hold them suspended; the vine-wreaths —that are not there—tremble, the grapes swell beneath the crystal water. The deluded boatman counts the number of the young shoots as he rows his bark skiff among the little waves to and fro across the outline of the reflections where the image of the hill loses itself in the water.

Ausonius might have said with a character in Balzac's *Médecin de campagne*: "Ah, monsieur, la vie en plein air, les beautés du ciel et de la terre, s'accordent si bien avec la perfection et les délices de l'âme." His tenderest thoughts are linked with memories of natural things. When Paulinus does not answer his letters, he reminds him that all nature is responsive; the hedge rustles as the bees despoil it, the reeds murmur sweetly to the stream, the tremulous tresses of the pines hold converse with the winds. It was a pathetic friendship, this, between two men of irreconcilable temperaments—the light-hearted Hedonist and the god-intoxicated saint. Both were of the same religion, for it seems unnecessary to have ever doubted that Ausonius was nominally a Christian, though he had far less in common with Paulinus than with a pagan man of the world such as Symmachus. He loved him, but the saying that to love is to understand is often tragically wrong. Ausonius did not understand his former pupil even well enough to gauge the abyss there was

between them. He looked on his abandonment of the world, in which no career would have been closed to him, as an inexplicable caprice. Paulinus refrained from argument; he knew that what men are they are—had he not given in to something very like the sacrifice of a pig to console the peasants for the loss of their ancient rites? He did not rebuke Ausonius for his frivolity, but after a time he wrote no more. In what seems to have been his final letter, without any reference to a last farewell he takes leave of his old friend and master with the promise that he will cherish him even after death, "for if the soul, surviving the dissolution of our mortal coil, is sustained by its heavenly origin, it must keep its sentiments and affections even as it keeps its existence: *it can no more forget than die, but must live and remember for ever.*" A beautiful saying, worthy of the saint who was one day to be followed to the grave by all the Jews, pagans, and heretics of the remote South Italian town to which he had exiled himself, and where he had spread the faith by love, not hatred.

On his side, Ausonius lived out his blameless if worldly life, and got a great deal of enjoyment out of it. That was a good time for literary men, and the Bordeaux professor rose to be Consul. He has the refined taste, however, to prize beyond everything the estate of moderate extent on the banks of the Garonne which his father and grandfather and great-

grandfather possessed before him. A devoted son, he was grieved when the day came for him to be lord of his "ancestral kingdom"; though his father was old, yet he died too soon. "When people love each other," says Ausonius, with a touch of the real tenderness which was his best gift, "it is so sweet to enjoy things together." But this filial piety only made him the more attached to his inheritance. It is amusing to find him, like so many Roman literary men, the hopeless victim of his steward. Philon, the steward, was a Greek, who insisted on being called ἐπίτροπος. His hair was wild and his appearance lamentable, but his pretensions were enormous. He cursed the gods when the crops went wrong through his carelessness, and, at last, occupied himself wholly with trafficking, racing from market to market, from village to village, and imposing alike on the buyers and on his master, who seems to have had an amiable weakness for being cheated.

Ausonius once wrote a description of town-life which throws light on the Roman longing for rural repose. The town was a minor town in Aquitania to which the poet had gone on business; he is resolved to get away as soon as he can after Easter, and heartily glad he will be. Who has not pictured, as he walked in the streets of Pompeii, the dignified calm of an antique city? No bicycles, no electric tram-cars, no automobiles; only men in togas moving

with deliberate steps. Ausonius lifts the curtain on a different scene. In the midst of the clamours of the mob and the vulgar rows at the street corners one is seized with disgust at the seething human mass, swaying up and down the narrow streets and blocking up even the squares. A whirl of confused cries wakes the echoes: "tene," "feri," "duc," "da," "cave." Here there is an escaping pig, there a mad dog ready to spring; in another place a scrimmage with badly harnessed oxen. In vain you shut yourself up in the most retired nook in the house; the cries pierce through the walls. Does it not make you long for the sweet leisure of a rural retreat, where you can write cart-loads of poetry with no other provision than the poet's only luggage—blank paper?

Martial gave not much better an account of Rome, where he groaned over the cries of the baker at night and the exasperating "two and two make four" of the school children in the morning, for the Roman schools were open to the streets except for a curtain, and the ears of the passers-by were "assassinated" by the repetition of the class lessons.

In Provençal poetry and afterwards in the early literature of France, there was a mass of verse in which the spring, the dawn, flowers, and leaves were played with for the mere pleasure of naming pleasant things. It was a taste as old as Anacreon, a copy of one of whose songs is a folk-song to-day in Provence.

But it was not a Roman taste, the seriousness of the Roman mind rejected the use of words as pretty toys. Ausonius wrote about the dawn and flowers as if he had been one of the *Pléiades*. In spite of what by a pun he called his "Italian name," he was, in truth, one of those Frenchmen, before there was a France, in whom Mommsen recognises all the characteristics of their modern representatives. He gave Ronsard the model for his most famous poem, a forgotten service, as many have read "Mignonne, allons voir la Rose," but few recollect where it came from. Critics have even tried to rob poor Ausonius of his rose-poem because it is "too good," and to bestow it on Virgil (who never wrote anything in the same vein), but this unkind attempt seems to have been abandoned. Here is the poem :

It was the spring ; the dawn a softer breeze
Sent through the chill air of the passing night,
And Nature prophesied the golden light,
Though the mist lingered yet among the trees.

I wandered through the garden drinking in
The new life of the morning ; from the stalks
Hung the dew-laden leaves across the walks,
And the wet roses watched the day begin.

Did Dawn take from the Rose its vermeil hue,
Or did the new-born Day make blush the flower ?
Each wears the beauty of the morning hour,
To each the ruddy tint and heavenly dew.

Of each is Venus queen, the flower, the star,
And e'en one perfume dwells perchance in each ;
But roses spread their sweets within our reach,
While the dawn's sweets are lost in vaults afar.

The little life of roses lasts an hour ;
Age kills them, for they learn not to grow old ;
The bud the morning star had seen unfold
The evening star sees droop and fade away.

Maiden ! gather the newly opened rose,
And gather it or ere thy youth be past,
For if the rose's bloom will perish fast,
The bloom of maidens all as quickly goes.

Before Ronsard, Bramante, better known as the architect of St. Peter's than as a sonneteer, paraphrased Ausonius with or without knowing it :

Dunque, mentre che dura il tempo verde,
Non far come quel fior che 'n su la pianta
Senza frutto nessun sue frondi perde.

Che quando il corpo in più vecchiezza viene,
Più di sua gioventù si gloria e vanta,
Vedendosi aver speso i giorni bene.

After Ronsard came Spenser :

Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time.

After Spenser, the inimitable parson with the gay pagan soul who was surely own brother to Ausonius ; after Herrick, Edmund Waller, rather gruesome than gay, and in the train of these immortals, a host of poets and preachers with baskets full of roses and an assortment of morals.

Each morn a thousand Roses brings, you say ;
Yes, but where leaves the Rose of yesterday ?

The poems of Ausonius are buried with yesterday's roses, a fate that would not have distressed him overmuch had he foreseen it, for he lived in the present and wrote for his friends more than for fame. He would have still enjoyed his morning walk and the sight of the dew on the cabbages. There were cabbages in that garden of his—a confession which honesty compels. Ausonius put his cabbages in his garden and in his verses, and did not think they spoilt either. It was an "old English" garden, with shrubs and roses and grass and vegetables mixed together. Who first made a walled garden in Europe for flowers alone? Probably the Moors. The anti-utilitarian instinct of the Oriental could not endure confusing a *plaisance* with a *potager*.

At the end of the fourth century the country-house was still the Roman's ideal of felicity. Symmachus, the correspondent and ardent admirer of Ausonius, had fifteen villas in Latium and Campania. Like Pliny the Younger, his preference was for Laurentum, but it seems to have been forsaken since Pliny's time, as Symmachus says that his villa "is not in such a wild, remote spot as people think." He liked to hunt the wild boar whose descendants fall to the gun of the king of Italy at Castel Porziano. In summer he leaves the sea for

the hills, where, of course, he has several charming retreats. He has been accused of not appreciating Nature because he speaks of pure air and leisure for reading as the greatest attractions of a country life, but he took care to carry his books to the loveliest places in the world.

The great administrators of the Roman Empire had that love of studious ease, that conception of literary work as *rest*, which has characterised many English statesmen and some, at least, of the British pro-consuls in India, as, for instance, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and more recently Sir Alfred Comyn Lyall, than whom it would be difficult to imagine a closer counterpart of the Roman public servant who could both think and do—scholar, poet, soldier on occasion, tried man of action, even the trend of his mind seemed to agree with the resemblance ; he had a shade of that antique melancholy which sprang from a conviction of the worth of this fleeting life, not from discontent with it. He was the only man I have ever known who gave me the idea that he would have been entirely at home in the Roman world.

Claudian, of Egyptian birth but purely Roman in spirit, approached far more nearly than Ausonius to the perfect style of the old poets, whose religion remained for him the only faith ; it was natural that he had fewer intuitions of modern sentiment, but two out of his many idylls form distinct

landmarks in the history of rustic poetry. The idyll had been successfully revived by Calpurnius a hundred years before, in eleven charming little poems, which show, however, the predominating Virgilian influence. In these two pastorals Claudian struck out a line for himself; he excluded all make-believe, all prettiness—he is simply realistic. One feels sure that he met the identical old man whom he describes in the following lines on some excursion to the country round Virgil's lake, which doubtless he would have visited during his residence at Milan :

Blest he whose life in fields paternal spent,
With one same house as boy or man content ;
Propt now by staff on ground where erst he crawled,
Of his old home the ages are recalled.
Him has not fate through countless turmoils led,
Not to drink foreign waters has he sped :
Merchant nor soldier, waves nor wars with awe
Have scared him, nor hoarse clamours of the law :
Shunning affairs and cities howe'er nigh,
With freer glance he gazes on the sky ;
By crops, not consuls, he computes the year :
Apples show autumn, flowers that spring is near.
His field both hides and shows the solar ray,
And by the sun's round he divides the day.
From what small germ the vast oak sprang he knows,
And marks the grove that with his own growth grows ;
Deems far as Ind Verona close at hand,
Benacus' lake far as the Red Sea strand.
Yet with firm force, strong arms that never fail,
The third race sees the grandsire stout and hale.
Others may roam and distant Spain explore,
This man lives longer though they travel more.

The old man is in easy though modest circumstances; his narrow bounds are those of choice, not of necessity. I knew an old gentleman who, living within a few hours of Venice, had never seen the sea nor wished to see it. But he died with the nineteenth century; was it the last that will produce such types?

Claudian's poem on the "Gallic Mules" is even more original than the one just quoted:

> See the tame natives of the rapid Rhone,
> Loose or in harness, like obedience own;
> A different order marks a different road,
> They know which path to take without the goad.
> Though each from the slack rein may distant be
> And each from the hard yoke its neck could free,
> Yet their hard toil with patience still they bear
> And cries barbaric mind, with docile ear.
> Their master's distant voice command retains,
> The human voice sufficing 'stead of reins;
> When scattered this collects them, and again
> Scatters, and makes them speed, or speed restrain.
> "To left" the order—to the left they go;
> The call changed "To the right," and so they do.
> Unforced by bonds, submissive, not afraid,
> Servants, not slaves, nor fierce by freedom made,
> They, like in will and like in tawny hue,
> Dragging the creaking wain their course pursue.
> Wonder no more that Orpheus' song could sway
> Wild beasts, since cattle Gallic words obey.

There is other evidence that the Gauls were celebrated for their skill with mules and horses; Varro says, "Galli appositissimi maxime ad iumenta." The pleased interest which Claudian takes in the

doings of the clever creatures reminds one that, though the Romans cannot be acquitted of insensibility to animal suffering, they could yet be charmed by any instance of superior intelligence in animals. Statius told the story of a tame lion who knew how to come out of its home and go back to it without guidance; when it died, the Senate and people of Rome were in despair, and even Caesar wept a tear.

Of the other late Latin poets in their relation to outdoor life, the one most worthy of notice is Rutilius, because he was more free from conventionality than the rest. Born in Gaul at the beginning of the fifth century, he composed a *voyage pittoresque*, narrating a journey from Rome to his native country, which was then convulsed by barbarian inroads. "When the fatherland is tranquil," he exclaims, "it is pardonable to neglect it, but in its misfortunes it has a right to all our devotion." He was very sorry to leave the "beloved climate" of Rome, and before setting out he kissed its sacred gates. He took the sea route on account of inundations in the plains, and also to avoid encounters with Gothic freebooters, whose devastations rendered the roads dangerous. His journey seems to have been the slowest on record; either from stress of weather or want of wind, or because it was hot or because it was cold, the ship was always putting in to shore, and Rutilius

and his fellow-travellers profited by the delays to explore the coast. Sometimes they slept on land in a slight, improvised shelter, after warming themselves by a fire of fragrant myrtle branches—it was October and the nights were chilly. On one of these occasions they visited a town in Tuscany called Falerium, famous for its beautiful white oxen, which were highly prized in Rome for sacrificial use. No one was indoors, for it was the celebration of the re-birth of the germ after the fruit is gathered and the leaves have fallen ; the hidden, mysterious renovation of Nature :

> The merry folk, dispersed in country lanes,
> Solaced with joyous rites their weary hearts,
> Because that day Osiris life regains
> And life to every living thing imparts.

Keats had never read those lines ; yet he might have been thinking of them when he wrote, in the wonderful ode which breathes the spirit of antiquity pure and undefiled :

> What little town by river or sea-shore
> Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel
> Is emptied of its folk this pious morn ?

In exploring the country round Falerium Rutilius finds a farm, a charming place with a coppice at the back and a fine fish-pond, broad and deep, in which you could see the fish playing about. It would appear that the poet and his companions were amus-

ing themselves by stirring the water when they were discovered by the owner, who resented their intrusion, and declared that they were ruining his trees, his pond, his fish, all that was his. A modern proprietor might not be much better pleased with a party of tourists who were making exceedingly free use of his domain, but for the Roman the stranger was sacred. This farmer (apparently a very good farmer too) was, to use Rutilius' uncivil description, "a churlish Jew, a sort of wild beast, unfit for human intercourse," and the offended Gaul screams his invective: "Wretched race, mother of all errors, which scrupulously keeps the frigid feast of the Sabbath and has a heart more frigid than its religion. They pass in idleness one day in the seven to imitate the fatigue of their God after the creation. The other dreams of these impostors would hardly find credence with children. Would to God that Judaea had never submitted to the arms of Pompey nor to those of Titus. The contagious superstitions of the Jews have only made the more way in consequence; this vanquished nation has proved fatal to its vanquishers."

Fatal to its vanquishers! "Qu'il est beau," wrote Pascal, "de voir, par les yeux de la foi, Darius, Cyrus, Alexandre, les Romains, Pompée, et Hérode, agir sans le savoir pour la gloire de l'Évangile!" So do extremes meet, the cry of despair and the cry

of triumph. Rutilius reveals to us, as by a flash of lightning, a pagan who was not tolerant—quite the contrary. Fresh from the spectacle of a joyous Nature fête, a vision confronts him of the cold, austere ceremonial of the Hebrew temple. It oppresses and stifles him. The thought of the Jews is confused with the thought of the Christians, whom, like other Romans, he regards as simply a Jewish sect. Presently he comes across some real Christians who have colonised the isle of Capraria, near which his ship passes : "A sort of men more like owls than anything else, calling themselves by the Greek name 'monk.'" They spend their lives shut up in cells "like vile slaves," whether by order of destiny or by their own morose temperament Rutilius does not know, but he deems it folly to fly from the joys and sorrows of life instead of taking its goods and putting up with its ills. And in this criticism there is a certain discrimination, for without doubt in all times timid souls have sought the cloister less to renounce joy than to shun sorrow, though who can tell if sorrow did not find them out? Happily for Rutilius, he soon forgets Jews and monks in the excitement of a wild boar hunt in the forests near Pisa ; the prize, a splendid boar, is carried home with blowing of horns and songs of mirth, like a stag in the Highlands. Meanwhile the sea rises mountains high, and the great white waves break on the sands of Viareggio, on

which, one day, they were to throw the body of a greater poet ; but the storm subsides and Rutilius can continue his voyage to the Bay of Spezia, where he admires "the marble hills whiter than snow"—words that close his poem as it comes down to us, for the rest is lost.

Antiquity was already in the article of death. Its last backward look in literature was cast on the peasant, the last of the faithful. Whoever was the author of the Greek romance which goes by the name of the *Pastorals of Longus*, he puts forth unconsciously a defence of Paganism where it was strongest—as the interpretation of Nature to simple folk whose toil it consecrated and whose minds it satisfied. He shows that degeneration had not invaded the country ; Daphnis and Chloe are as innocent as Paul and Virginia, and far more innocent than the splendid dames and knights of the great cycle of Christian romance, in which not the dawn of love but its sultry meridian formed the text.

But just because the Roman peasant was not debased, he felt little need to raise himself; just because his religion was tangibly real to him, he wanted no other. No European peasant, with the possible exception of the Celt, ever had the nostalgia of the Unseen known to Hebrew shepherds and Arab camel-drivers.

In the towns, not in the country, the Christian

Church found the ground prepared for it. The idea of a divine brotherhood appealed to slaves; the idea of morally obligatory self-denial appealed to men sick of self-indulgence, not only in the lower but in the higher sense—indulgence in the appetites of the mind, not only in those of the body; the presentation of a Perfect Object of loving service appealed to the innate altruism of women; the promise of a peace which passeth all understanding came as music to a society penetrated by the unrest of an expiring epoch. And, it may be, chief among the factors which prepared the great change was the passionate desire to pierce the veil of death and clasp hands once more:

Une immense espérance a traversé la terre.

XII

TRANSFORMATION

When the violet rocks of Paxos come into sight between the blue of sky and sea after leaving Corfu, the traveller must be cast in an insensible mould who feels no strong emotion. Here it was, close by the isle of Paxos, that nineteen hundred years ago Ionian sailors heard uttered by an extraordinary voice the words: "Pan is dead." So important was the fact thought to be, that a messenger was sent to communicate the news of it to Tiberius. The Emperor's astrologers, questioned as to what it meant, could give no answer. Our modern ears will always hear in that extraordinary voice "the melancholy long withdrawing roar" of the faith of antiquity.

Pan was the Shelley among the gods. Was there ever a description of a god that so suited a poet as the description of Pan by Euripides suits Shelley?

When Pan was a child his father Hermes took him into heaven wrapped in a little hare-skin. All

the Immortals were delighted, but most of all Dionysus—himself the impersonation of the highest Nature-rapture.

Pan grew up and exchanged the hare-skin for a lynx-skin and took to the *macchia* — the wild, open country—dancing among the hyacinth and crocus starred meadows and filling the air with sweet laughter. And he was the joy of all, as he had been of the Immortals when he was introduced to them as a droll and charming child.

Around the evanescent personality of the shepherd god floated ideas too evanescent for formulae; he held a place, if not in the belief, at least in the imagination of the cultivated Greek, which was the larger because it was so undetermined. There was a sort of tenderness in the tone in which they spoke of him as of early memories that have become dreams. The most beautiful prayer that was ever spoken outside Palestine was addressed not to Zeus, not to Apollo, not to Pallas Athene or Artemis Virgin, but to Pan:

> O sweet Pan and ye other gods, whoever ye be, grant to me to be beautiful within.

So prayed Socrates in his only country walk.

The shepherd god was the embodiment of the indwelling unconscious joy of Nature. In a sense, he was the embodiment of the peasant himself. Antiquity was not all brightness and sunshine; over

the cradle of the Greek race floated the immense conception of Necessity with its machine-like punishment of evil, regardless of personal responsibility and unaccompanied by the Hebrew promise of an earthly reward to the just man who suffers or the Christian assurance of paradise to the crushed saint. And yet the natural aspiration of the Greek was towards optimism, an aspiration which found its goal in the Platonic vision of a perfect Universe. The side of joy and sun was the side that the peasant knew. For him the gods were gracious and they were near. Some one divine who took an interest in him, some one who lived in the temple in the grove and who was pleasant with little offerings—this was the Greek or Roman peasant's god. A Neapolitan friar once begged of an Englishman a few sous for a wayside shrine. "How can the Queen of Heaven be in want of a few sous?" asked the Englishman. "It is *not* the Queen of Heaven," answered the friar, "it is the *poor* Madonna of the grotto who has hardly enough to buy oil for her lamp." So did the peasant of old look upon his familiar gods, and much consolation he drew from his point of view.

He did not ask the gods that he might be beautiful within; he asked them just to take care of him and of his crops. The prayer in early Latin preserved by Cato shows us how he prayed:

Father Mars, I pray and implore thee that thou wouldst turn away from us diseases, seen and unseen, destitution, desolation, distress, and violence, and that thou wouldst suffer the fruits of the earth, corn, grass, and young trees, to increase and thrive, and wouldst preserve shepherds and their flocks in safety.

And surely this prayer also is good, and must have comforted the heart that prayed. In spirit it differs little from a prayer of the Athenians which is quoted by Marcus Aurelius :

Send down, oh ! send down rain, dear Zeus, on the ploughed fields and plains of the Athenians !

With these may be compared the prayer of Aeneas on setting sail for Italy :

We follow thee, O Holy Power, whoever thou art, and once more with joy obey thy commands. Oh ! be present ; lend us thy propitious aid and light up friendly stars in the heavens.

We are often invited to compare the beliefs of primitive peoples which have become great with those of people whom we are pleased to call savages, for the purpose of showing that the same rude and repulsive notions are found to be common to both. Instead of always pursuing this plan, we might occasionally try to discover what divine spark unites them, what common glimpse of moral beauty proclaims them *man*. Perhaps we should find this golden link in their prayers ; in prayer, a great poet

once said, it is sufficient to "look outside oneself." It seems a long way from the ancient Roman cultivator to the Hidery who inhabit certain islets on the north-west coast of America, but the petition of the first to Father Mars is very like the petition of the last to their Sun Totem :

> O thou, good Sun, look down upon us. Shine on us, O Sun. Take away the dark clouds that the rain may cease to fall, because we want to go hunting (or fishing, as the case may be). Look kindly on us, O Sun. Grant us peace in our midst, as well as with our enemies. Again we ask, hear us, O Sun.

In the religion of the antique peasant the character of a Nature cult still predominated. The poetic attribution to the gods of human passions did not touch him closely ; he was content to know that they represented and governed natural forces which *he recognised as in the main benign*—this was the great point of superiority in Greek and Roman mythology over the gloomy cults of Asia. The analogy of kindlier and more beautiful physical surroundings doubtless caused the modification—an example of the power of ambient in differentiating races and creeds. The peasant neither had the doubt nor the indifference which disposes to a new faith. Nor had he the moral cravings of a conscience which is always growing. It is less philosophic scepticism than the evolution of new moral ideals that works great

religious changes. The peasant had no ideals, only realities, but they were good realities—respect for the old folks, love of his wife (even though he did lag a little in the town), love of his children, and labour, continual but not hopeless or degrading; and finally, respect for the gods, who were quite as real to him as men were. The peasant world is made up of the peasant who works and the peasant who does not work. The peasant who gets his work done by women or by imported labourers is fond of fighting, like the Corsican and the Montenegrin; the peasant who does all the work himself is fond of peace, like the Greek and the Roman countryman of ancient times.

Paganism, the "religion of rustics," as in the end the ancient faith was called, formed, all along, an agricultural religion, a name given to it by the most *spirituel* and the least spiritual of ecclesiastics, the Neapolitan neo-pagan Galiani. As the letters of the witty Abbé are little known, I am tempted to quote his shrewd remarks.

"La Géorgique," he writes to Mme. D'Épinay in 1770, "n'est plus un sujet de poëme à notre âge. Il faut une religion agricole, chez un peuple coloniste, pour parler avec emphase et avec grandeur des abeilles, des poireaux et des oignons. Avec votre triste consubstantialité et transsubstantiation, que voulez-vous qu'on fasse? Il y a deux sortes de religions: celles des peuples nouveaux sont riantes, et ne sont qu'agriculture, médicine, athlétique, et population.

Celles des vieux peuples sont tristes et ne sont que métaphysique, rhétorique, contemplation, élévation de l'âme ; elles doivent causer l'abandon de la cultivation, de la population, de la bonne santé et des plaisirs. Nous sommes vieux."

An agricultural religion naturally suited peasants. The gods were divine benefactors who could be rendered propitious by certain stated and simple means. If things, nevertheless, went wrong, the peasant is a man of infinite resignation. He began again. If he died—well, the gods only do not know death. The Beyond? Plato blamed Homer for saying that it was better to be the servant of one who had not himself enough bread to eat, than to be a king of ghosts, because this picture of Hades as "a dreadful place" was likely to diminish men's courage in face of death. But the peasant, if he thought of Hades at all, probably did not think so very ill of it. Anyhow it was a place of rest. The Lares formed a cheerful link between the dead and the living, and the peasant really believed in the Lares, which the cultivated Roman did not. For the rest, he had not the obstinate yearnings, the restless curiosity, of more finely strung minds. He felt that he was living conformably to a stronger will which made—not exactly for righteousness—but for order.

Suddenly the news was conveyed to the peasants

that there was not a word of truth in their religion; no, something worse; that it all belonged to the spirit of evil of whom they had never heard; that their gods were not merely a delusion, but hateful, to be crushed, broken, maledicted. And they were seized with the vertigo of the earthquake—that peculiar sense that the one solid thing is giving way under your feet, which alarms you or not, according to the state of your nerves, but which certainly impresses. The Church began to feel itself strong. Heretics were first put to death in A.D. 385, and if it were right to suppress heresy with the sword it must certainly be right to suppress Paganism with the pickaxe. The peasants, many of whom had never heard of Christ, saw the approach of men dressed in black and not much washed. "How can dirt be pleasing to divinity?" Rutilius had asked; but for many centuries it was thought to be one of the surest means of salvation. Did not St. Bernard say in praise of the Templars: "They never dress gaily and wash but seldom"? The "Black Men" broke the statues and threw down the shrines. It was in vain that Libanius, Julian's tolerant minister, the Pagan friend of Basil and Chrysostom, implored Theodosius to stay the hand of these missionaries of destruction; in vain he pleaded that to the peasants the temple was the very eye of Nature, the symbol and manifestation of a present deity, the solace of all

their troubles, the holiest of all their joys. In vain. Through the length and breadth of the land the peasants heard of Christ for the first time from the mouths of the monks who were come to destroy their altars.

Sometimes the very destroyers were seized with a haunting sense of sacrilege, for it is recorded that "to St. Martin of Tours the gods whose altars he had broken, Jupiter or Mercury, Venus or Minerva, came in dreams, bitterly reproaching him." How much more horror-struck must have been the unconverted!

To the man of simple mind his religion is always the only one. Whether it is attacked in the name of a purer or higher faith, or in the name of a harsher or cruder one, or in the name of pure denial, it is the same thing; for him it is *true*—why inquire if it is good or probable? Wireless telegraphy is improbable, but it is a fact. This is precisely the basis of belief of those who believe and who do not make-believe-to-believe.

Therefore the peasant had the feeling of the earthquake; but, as happens after an earthquake, the sense of security returned. The pickaxe was not proof; the altars might fall but the gods were real. The peasants made this reflection, and, where they could, they resisted; where they could not, they submitted—especially outwardly. They took care

to retain a great part of their old religion. When sick (as St. Augustine deplored) they sent for some old Pagan woman who knew magic remedies. A day or two before Byron died at Missolonghi he asked those around him to try to find some "ugly old woman" of magical repute, such as the Greeks sent for when they were ill. The witch was actually found, but as he did not again ask for her, she was not brought to his bedside. The religion of one age became the witchcraft of another, and witchcraft in the South is still flourishing.

For many centuries much more than such-like mere scraps of the old faith subsisted. Sacrifices of fire and incense were tolerated after the killing of animals was forbidden, but the peasants met for a family feast, and in their hearts they consecrated to their gods the animal killed. This continued for a very long time. Originally the Emperor had not encouraged recourse to actual violence; indeed Libanius' chief argument was that Theodosius could not know or countenance the things done by the "Black Men," who left the fields barren "to put themselves, as they pretended, into communication with the Creator of the Universe on the mountains." But the Church pressed him forward, and the Church, which had quieted the scruples once felt by it about violence to heretics, could not be expected to have any where it was a question of Pagans.

At first the crusade was limited to the Eastern Empire, but it was taken up in the West by Valentinian II., who forbade even hanging up garlands, or lighting lamps, or the fire on the hearth in honour of the Lares, or the libation before drinking. Valentinian lost his life in consequence, but, as usual, assassination did not effect its object. Theodosius was now absolute in East and West, and in the beginning of the fifth century the country districts of Italy were scoured.

The official existence (so to speak) of Paganism ended in the sixth century, when Justinian closed its last-recognised refuge, the Academy of Athens; but in lonely and isolated places it lasted in its fullest acceptation till much later. A side-light on the position of latter-day Pagans is thrown in the following extract from a letter written by Gregory the Great to the Empress Constantina:

Having heard that there are many Gentiles in the island of Sardinia, and that, according to their depraved custom, they still sacrifice to idols, and that the priests of the island have become lax in preaching our Redeemer, I sent one of the Italian bishops there, who, with the help of God, converted many of these Gentiles to the faith. But he has informed me of a sacrilegious matter, namely, that those who sacrifice to idols pay a tax to the judge that it may be permitted to them; of whom some, now being baptized, have given up sacrificing to idols, yet still this tax which they had been accustomed to pay for that purpose is exacted from them by the same judge even after baptism. And

when he was found fault with by the bishop for this, he answered that he had promised to pay so much for his post, which he could not do unless by these means.

The Pope adds that in Corsica the islanders are so ground down by taxation that they hardly pay the taxes even by selling their own children. Here, at least, is the Head of the Church in his best character, that of pleader for the poor with the great and powerful in the name of an authority higher than theirs. Gregory has been accused of destroying many classical works owing to the attraction which they lent to Paganism, but on what is considered insufficient evidence. In the ninth century, the Mainots in the Peloponnesus still worshipped the gods, and there were Pagans in the Tyrolese valleys at the same date. No doubt in some secluded spots they existed even later.

Then, on a certain day in a certain year, an old man, bent and feeble, went forth softly to make the last offering to the gods. Perhaps it was a garland hung on a tree near the place where a shrine had stood. He felt very sure that the offering was accepted—he felt that the gods, forsaken now by all, must be glad to see their faithful worshipper. Gods have their troubles like men; it is sad to be left alone. The old man, when he had hung the flowers on the bough, went back to his abode and lay down on his bed, for he was tired. He closed his eyes

and he did not open them again. The last Pagan was dead.

Before glancing at the process by which the Southern peasants became as devoted to the new faith as they had been to the old, we may notice a point of some singularity. It is this. If we look at the Christianity, not of Emperors and Black Men in the fifth century, but of the first hunted Christians in the tombs, we observe a tendency to assimilate Christian dogma to the simplest pastoral symbolism of the ancient myths—a tendency to form a new *religion agricole*, humaner, diviner than the old, but still rural, still speaking of the peace of the fields. The Christians in the Catacombs, experiencing the Italian need to give a pictorial rendering to their faith, represented the Founder of it not as the Christ enthroned on the Globe of the Ravenna mosaics, or the Christ crucified of the modern Church Universal. Historically Christ was still one who had failed ; the spiritual conquest of all the world, which may have seemed, at the time when the mosaics of S. Vitale were made, an almost certain event (far more probable than it can seem to us now), was to the Christians of the second century at most a desire. Hence they made no pictures of enthroned Christs. And as for the Crucifix, an early Christian placed before the crucified Christ of Velasquez would have felt a thrill of horror, of outraged decency, as if he had

been shown the agony of one of his own friends who had been put to death. The tragedy was too near.

The persecuted Christians represented Christ under types taken from the ancient idylls, as Orpheus with his lyre, or as a shepherd youth with lamb or kid on his shoulder, standing among olive branches and rose-trees, the fruits of summer, the wheat-sheaves of autumn.

> . . . . . But she sigh'd,
> The infant Church of love, she felt the tide
> Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave.
>
> And then she smiled; and in the Catacombs,
> With eye suffused but heart inspired true,
> On those walls subterranean, where she hid
> Her head 'mid ignominy, death and tombs,
> She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew.

Under entirely changed circumstances the early idyllic type came into use again among the scholar poets of the Renaissance, who were no longer simple and ingenuous, but steeped in a learning which they were eager to display. Only one, the half-Puritan Spenser, joins the classical terminology to an impassioned earnestness which recalls the fervour of the Catacombs rather than the preciosity of humanism:

> And wonned not the great god Pan
> Upon Mount Olivet,
> Feeding the blessed flocks of Dan
> Which dyd himselfe beget?

O blessed sheepe ! O shepherd great,
That bought his flock so deare,
And them dyd save with bloudy sweat
From wolves that would them teare !

The statue of Christ, young and beautiful, by Michelangelo, in the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, which nearly all who go to see it call "Pagan," is, perhaps, the only famous work of art representing the Redeemer that would have satisfied the early Christians.

Had the crusading monks trusted more to the story of Christ the Good Shepherd and less to the pickaxe, it is possible that the work of conversion would have advanced more rapidly. As it was, the slowness with which it advanced caused poignant distress to true servants of Christ, who thirsted to save souls and bring light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. How was the task to be accelerated ? There are problems which are solved by acts, not by words. No Christian saint or doctor would have said even to himself : "The way to gain over the peasants is to assimilate the new faith to the old." But, in practice, that was what was done.

The doctors, however, had not much to do with it. St. Augustine set his face resolutely against the veneration of images, and insisted that Christ should be sought in the Bible. But men of undoubted

holiness, scattered about the country, could not resist the temptation of trying "by all means to save some," and the way which proved by far the most efficacious was to let the peasants keep or re-establish a cult which, in outward particulars, was as like as possible to the one they were called upon to renounce :

> So these nations feared the Lord and served their graven images, both their children and their children's children ; as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.

Certainly the names were changed ; for Diana, Guardian of the Harbours, there was Mary, Star of the Sea ; for Diana, dwelling in the mountains, there was Mary, Our Lady of the Snows. Fortuna Primigenia became the Madonna della Fortuna. The names were changed, but is there so very much in a name?

A pretty story told by St. Paulinus illustrates exactly by what steps the peasant began to feel at home in the new faith. A countryman recommended his beloved oxen to Felix, the legendary Saint of Nolo. "He loves them better than his own children!" writes Paulinus, and his care of them was extreme, but lo and behold! one night they were stolen out of the stable! Thereupon the countryman violently upbraided St. Felix for his unpardonable negligence (just as he would have done if the negligent protector had been a sylvan god). Nothing would satisfy him unless he recovered those

very same oxen—no others would do. Well, and what happened? Paulinus may tell it: "St. Felix forgave the want of politeness for the sake of the abundance of faith, and he laughed with Our Lord over the injurious expressions addressed to him." That night the oxen walked back into the stable.

Paulinus seems to have been the first person who had pictures painted *inside* a church, though his object was only to interest and edify; he did not intend them for veneration. Those pictures were the lineal ancestors of the altar-pieces of Raphael. Without them, let it be remembered, we should have had no Christian Art.

Pictures in churches probably began everywhere as a device to amuse the peasants, and the veneration of images may have sprung from the peasants, in out-of-the-way places, saving favourite statues of their gods by giving them new names. In my own garden there is a statue, called by the peasants "la Madonna Mora," the head of which, certainly an antique, much resembles the head of a Diana found at Pompeii.

Thus did the country-folk, from being the last Pagans, become the pillar of the Church, and when the supremacy of Rome was threatened to its foundations it was chiefly the peasants allied to the "Black Men" who saved it.

Contact with a monotheistic race made the

educated classes in Byzantium ashamed of forms of worship which intelligent Mohammedans told them were Paganism over again. If success had crowned the Iconoclastic movement, the cult of the Saints would have been reduced within narrow limits, and the power of the priesthood would have received an irrevocable blow. It failed, from a coalition of women, peasants, and monks (a great part of the higher clergy was in favour of it). The Popes had the fortunate accident of siding with Italian nationality against strangers for the second time—the first was in the struggle with the Arian Goths.

XIII

THE DIVINE PASTORAL

The unique place which the *Altissimo Poeta* occupied in the first twelve Christian centuries was due, without doubt, to his fame as a prophet. This is the most reasonable explanation of the ascription to him of magical powers; he could not have been a prophet quite like the others, argued the unlearned man, with his rough logic—therefore, he was a beneficent kind of wizard. On the other hand, scholars and theologians accepted the theory that Virgil arrived at foreknowledge by divine favour; they did not think it necessary to bring magic on the scene. There was one sceptic, a man whose erudition was not less than his candour, which might have led him to the stake had he lived at the right time—St. Jerome. He turned the whole matter into ridicule, but no one agreed with him. From St. Augustine to Abélard, the flower of mediaeval learning believed that the Fourth Eclogue was a prophecy of the birth of Christ. Constantine the

Great, in his oration to the Assembly of the Saints, brings the Eclogue forward to convince those who were not convinced by a certain acrostic on the name of Jesus Christ, which passed for a Sibylline prophecy, and which, he says sadly, many persons supposed to have been composed "by some one professing our faith and not unacquainted with the poetic art"—to have been, in short, a forgery, as it actually was. Now, the Eclogue was not a forgery, and the Sibylline prediction on which it was based was held to be genuine. Constantine's enthusiasm for Virgil knew no bounds: he called him the Prince of Latin poets, and "this admirably wise and accomplished man." His discourse on the Eclogue has been said to be too scholarly for him to have written it, but it is hard to set aside the positive statement of Eusebius that the Emperor did write this and many other orations in Latin, which were turned into Greek by a special staff of translators maintained for the purpose. Indeed, Eusebius gives one the idea that Constantine was as fond of composing speeches as a Caesar of a much later date.

An ancient legend tells of the visit of St. Paul to Virgil's tomb at Naples, and Dante makes Statius thank the Mantuan Vates for converting him. Successive popes quoted the Eclogue as a prophecy. Theologians pointed to various texts in Scripture in which the existence of prophets among the Gentiles

seemed to be suggested. Though Dante's story of the conversion of Statius does not seem to have been true, there is no reason entirely to reject such stories. The ancient world looked on prophecy somewhat as we look on astronomical predictions; and with minds so disposed, Virgil's oracle might work a remarkable effect. To say, as has been said, that the interpretation of the Eclogue in a Christian sense was the result of "a curious misconception," fails to do justice to the high intellect of the men who so interpreted it. These men were influenced by the religious atmosphere of their time, but they would not have been so obtuse as to suppose a Pagan poem to be a Messianic prophecy had it not looked remarkably like one. It would have been more curious if no one had been struck by the resemblance. Without altering the meaning, as Pope did, but by a very simple process of selection and omission, it is easy to show the spirit in which the poem was read. I have done this in the following version, from which the mythological names are left out; but even these, which sound incongruous to us, did not sound so in times when it was common for poets to mix up Christian and Pagan personages:

Sicilian muses, let me sing again!
  But not to all gives still uncloyed delights
The leafy grove where I too long have lain;
  Lift then my rural song to higher flights.

Now comes the Age of which the Sibyl told,
When ancient Justice shall return to earth,
And Time's great book its final page unfold,
Since Time is ripe and hails the Heavenly Birth.

The Iron Race shall cease, and soon elate
A Golden Race its happy course begin ;
The nations dwell together without hate,
Man being born anew and cleansed of sin.

One, whom Immortal Presences surround,
Where light of life immortal grows not dim,
A happy world shall rule in peace profound,
His Father's virtue manifest in Him.

O Child ! Earth brings thee all her first green things,
Ivy and holly, winter's little store,
Undriven the she-goat her sweet burden brings,
And mighty lions affright the herds no more.

Dead lies the poisonous snake among the grass,
And dead the nightshade and the hemlock dead ;
Only sweet herbs spring up where thou shalt pass,
And flowering branches o'er thy cradle spread.

Dear Child ! begotten of the Eternal Sire,
The heavens to tell thee near with gladness rang ;
O could I see the world's fulfilled desire,
Then would I sing as poet never sang.

Still on thine eyes no mortal eyes have shone,
Thy mother waits thee still, weary the while ;
The full months bid her smile upon her Son,
Begin, O Child, to know her by her smile.

The prophetical view was, of course, unaffected by the question of exactly what Virgil had in his mind. On this point conjecture was divided. Con-

stantine held that the poet "was acquainted with that blessed mystery which gave our Lord the name of Saviour," but that, to avoid persecution, he obscured the truth and drew the thoughts of his hearers to objects with which they were familiar. Others believed, more rationally, that Virgil spoke he knew not what—which did not interfere with the validity of the prophecy, since the essence of prophetical writings lies in their foreshadowing events of which their authors had no intellectual perception. Therefore, in the Ages of Faith, Virgil's conscious intention was a secondary matter. To us, on the contrary, it is a point of great interest, but we are as far as ever from throwing light on it. Prejudice, which once existed on one side, changed over to the other; the wish to interpret the Eclogue supernaturally gave place to a wish to interpret it naturally: thus "Iovis incrementum," from being "progeny of Jove," became "*protégé* of Jove"—though the former meaning seems, to say the least, a more probable one than the latter. It was discovered that Pollio's son, an intolerable person, really went about boasting that he was the fated infant. This discovery is important because it shows that Virgil's own contemporaries did not know of whom he was speaking. But the theory it involves is the most extravagant of all. Virgil says that the great event is to happen while Pollio is Consul, which would be a strange way

of saying that the great event was the birth of his own son. Apart from this, Virgil could not have made such predictions about the son of a simple administrator without committing rank treason against Augustus. The theory of an Imperial offspring has much more to recommend it, only we cannot find the Imperial offspring. One of the greatest authorities on Virgil, Professor Sellar, decided against the claims of the unfortunate Julia, previously regarded as the best candidate. Some critics have seen in the Fourth Eclogue the aspiration towards a new and renovated Rome, but this is a case of "thinking into" an ancient poet ideas which an ancient poet would not have thought. On the whole, the most reasonable opinion is that of Gaston Boissier, who brought to the subject not only scholarship but a profound and sympathetic study of the epoch. The accomplished French writer declined to attach any definite meaning to the poem, which he preferred to consider a reflection of the vague unsettlement and expectancy prevailing in the Roman world during the last half-century before Christ.

The dream of a return to a golden age was not unknown in classical literature, but it was at the end of the kite—a dream which knows itself to be a dream. When the theory of the ages was treated by a realist like Hesiod, he made the worst age come last, anticipating the modern oracles of degeneration. Aristotle

evolved a system of self-repeating cycles which depended on the position of the heavenly bodies, but it presents few analogies with Virgil's millennium. The idea of a universal peace has been connected from the earliest times with the birth or sojourn upon earth of certain exceptional beings.

Virgil must have remembered what is called the Twenty-fourth Idyll of Theocritus (though by some it is supposed not to be by him). Professor Sellar saw no trace of Theocritean influence in the "Pollio," but the "Pollio" and the "Little Hercules" both deal with prophecies about a wonderful child. The seer Tiresias tells how the mothers of a later day, when they sit spinning in the evening twilight, will sing the praise of Alcmena, and call her the glory of womanhood. Her child shall be the greatest of heroes; he shall overcome men and monsters, and there shall be peace on earth: "the wolf that finds the kid in its lair shall not harm it." When all is said, however, we cannot deny that the allusions, and especially the general tone of the Fourth Eclogue, remind us less of any classical myth than of parts of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Why did no Roman Sir William Jones or Edward FitzGerald draw the attention of his receptive, inquisitive fellow-countrymen to the wealth of poetry lying *perdu* in the Jewish sacred books? How was it that the Septuagint attracted so little notice? It

is assumed that the Romans set their minds against everything foreign that was not Greek, but this seems to be disproved by the almost frantic way in which, latterly, they ran after Oriental fashions in religious rites. I have heard the suggestion that the cause of the neglect of the Septuagint was the little skill of its authors, which rendered many of the finest passages of the original commonplace or incomprehensible.

Virgil was a learned man and was particularly versed in Alexandrine learning, but no one thinks that he possessed direct knowledge of the Old Testament; had he read it, even in its imperfect Greek form, it would have left more traces in his works. On the other hand, it is possible that fragments of Hebrew prophecies crept into the Sibylline books which replaced the older ones that were destroyed when the Capitol was burnt during the first civil war. This would account for Virgil's associating Messianic ideas with the sibyl.

It is also possible that the great revival of these ideas among the Jews themselves led to their becoming known and even giving rise to discussion among the Gentiles. The opportunism of Herod the Great —his ready exchange of the last shreds of Jewish independence for the civilities of Caesar—drove the more ardent spirits of patriots and dreamers to a passionate rebound from despair to hope. The

Simeons who waited for the consolation of Israel, the Annas who looked for redemption in Jerusalem, sent, perchance, a magnetic thrill of longing through a world which had nothing in common with their race or their faith.

Besides Virgil, another famous Gentile was believed to have foreshadowed the birth of Christ. This was Zoroaster, on whose prophecies an ancient tradition affirmed that the Magi based their researches. Zoroaster did predict that a Saviour would be born of a Virgin, so that the tradition was not without justification. No incident of the infancy of Christ took so strong a hold of the popular imagination during the early centuries as the Magi's visit. In the homage of the Wise Men the Church saw prefigured the subjection of the Gentile world. To emphasise their symbolical significance, the "Wise Men" became "kings." These changes happen automatically; people cannot relate a story without giving it a colour of preconceived ideas. It was to guard against similar unconscious modifications that the Jews devised the extraordinarily ingenious method for preserving the purity of the sacred text which was carried out in the Massorah. If it is difficult to keep a written canon pure, it is far more difficult to prevent the phantasy of the pious from embroidering "improvements" on that part of it which slips into oral legend.

In the Roman catacombs there are two or three drawings of the Virgin lifting up the Child to the adoration of the Magi, and the subject reappears in a mosaic in the sixth-century Church of S. Apollinare Nuovo at Ravenna. Almost always when the subject of the Nativity was treated in early Christian art (which was not often) it was in connexion with the Wise Men's visit. The same is true of early hymnology. Synesius of Cyrene, the poet-bishop of Ptolemais, who lived at the beginning of the fifth century, wrote the impressive rhapsody which E. B. Browning translated in her "Greek Christian Poets":

> What time thou wast pourèd mild
> From an earthly vase defiled,
> Magi with fair arts besprent
> At thy new star's orient.
> Trembled inly, wondered wild,
> Questioned with their thoughts abroad—
> "What then is the new-born Child?
> Who the hidden God?
> God, or corpse, or king?"
> Bring your gifts, oh, hither bring
> Myrrh for rite—for tribute gold—
> Frankincense for sacrifice.
> God! thine incense take and hold!
> King! I bring thee gold of price!
> Myrrh with tomb will harmonize.

The Magi became great personages in the Middle Ages by reason of their alleged relics, which were first preserved in St. Sophia, then given to the city of

Milan, and lastly transferred to Cologne when Milan fell into the hands of Frederick Barbarossa in 1162—a robbery which much distressed the Milanese, who resolved to represent a mystery of the Three Kings every year to keep alive the memory of their former custody of these venerable bones. They always hoped to get the relics back, and a few years ago they did get back a portion of them, which were put in the tomb at Sant' Eustorgio, from which they had been stolen more than seven hundred years before. Everything comes to those who know how to wait —long enough.

Virgil himself frequently figured in the mysteries of the Middle Ages, accompanied by the Sibyl. In the earliest specimen extant, the office of the Nativity, which was performed at Limoges in the tenth century, "Virgilius Maro, goddess" (*sic*) "of the Gentiles," is asked if it is true that he was a witness to Christ. The poet replies with a line from his Eclogue.

XIV

PUER PARVULUS

A STUDY of the religion of the modern peasant may seem to have little to do with the outdoor life of antiquity, but, in truth, the religion of the peasant has reminded me as often as his agricultural methods of the continuity of life in Southern lands. After the stamping out of Paganism the country became reconsecrated; the Divine Presences returned; the sanctuary was back on the hilltop; once more the rude image looked kindly on the field. Much was as it had been before. Nevertheless, in the peasant himself a wonderful thing had happened: he had made a discovery greater than that of the Pole, the discovery of the next world. Harvest and seedtime and the sleep of winter carried a new significance.

> Over the golden grain light lies the well-turned furrow,
> Deeper the furrow that waits, toiler, the end of thy toil:
> Merrily plough and sow: e'en now in the dark earth's bosom
> Quickens the living food and Hope forsakes not the grave.[1]

If there was less of unconscious joy, there was a

[1] "Dem Ackerman" of Goethe.

conscious joy that surpassed it. In place of the human twin of the Faun of Praxiteles stood the *Vecchietto* of the *Sacro Monte*—an old labouring-man gazing upward with god-illuminated face. The belief in a Beyond permeates the peasant's faith in its entirety, and this must not be forgotten when pointing out the externalism of some of his observances and the stage of development to which his religious intelligence belongs.

There was no actual cult of the Infant Saviour till the thirteenth century. Bonaventura, the "seraphic doctor," related how the wish came to St. Francis of Assisi so to commemorate the birth of Christ as to move the people to devotion. This wish he prepared to carry out at the castle of Grescio with the greatest solemnity. That there might be no murmurs, he first sought the permission of the Pope, after obtaining which he put hay in a manger and caused the ox and the ass to be brought to the place, and around there was a great multitude. It was a most beautiful night and many lamps were lit and all the wood resounded with the solemn sound of the songs chanted by the religious brothers. The Man of God stood before the manger full of ineffable sweetness, weeping for holy joy. On a daïs raised above the manger, Mass was said, and the Blessed Francis chanted the holy Gospel and preached to the people on the

Nativity of Our Lord, whom he called on this occasion *lo Bambin de Belem* out of the tenderness of great love.

Some of us have looked with mortal eyes on the fields of Bethlehem which are still so fair and green. With that unchanged setting before us, if we were not dull indeed, we saw as in a vision the shepherds who watched their flocks by night; we heard as in a dream the song of glory to God and peace to man which, floating from the Syrian skies, has been borne to the farthest ends of the earth. The divine idyll related by St. Luke alone among the evangelists seemed to take life and form. To me it is not doubtful that memories carried away by the Saint from the real Bethlehem suggested the idea of making the scene of the Nativity live again among his Umbrian hills.[1] He knew that the humble folk to whom he cared most to address himself *believe what they see*. For the time being what they see is real to them. They receive from it the same emotions; it receives from them the same homage. It is not a matter of stocks and stones but of the reverse of stocks and stones. It is an intense power of imagination brought into activity by the touch of a material spring.

It was the mission if not the conscious object

[1] M. Paul Sabatier has been so kind as to send me the following dates which coincide well with this theory: Journey of St. Francis in the East 1219-1220; institution of the *Presepio* at the castle of Grescio, December 24, 1224.

of Francis of Assisi to develop the latent democratic forces of Catholicism, and he foresaw, with the insight of men of faith, the place which the manger of the Babe of Bethlehem would conquer in the affections of the Southern rural masses. Easter is the great popular feast in the Eastern Church, Christmas in the Latin,—especially in Italy. One is the feast of the next world, the other of this. Italians are fond of this world. Then, too, what could appeal more strongly to the followers of the plough, the keepers of the sheepfold, than the image of the Child born "fra il bue e l' asinello"? The poverty of the Holy Family, on which no emphasis is laid in the Gospels, is dwelt upon constantly in the later literature of the Nativity; the simple explanation of the birth in the stable—that there was no room at the inn—is left out of sight. The Italian peasant thinks, and draws patience from the thought, that Joseph and Mary could not afford to pay for a better lodging.

The erection of the first manger or *presepio* in the castle of Grescio was painted by Giotto in one of his frescoes in the upper church at Assisi. He represents the Saint in the act of constructing the manger, when the image of the child Jesus which he holds in his arms miraculously wakes to life. But the influence of the *presepio* in art had been felt before that; it may be perceived in the Nativity

which Nicolo Pisano carved on the pulpit of the Baptistery at Pisa. Though it is not necessary to connect every artistic presentation of the Nativity with the custom which soon prevailed in every household of erecting a manger at Christmas, it is yet plain that there was an intimate relationship between the two. Both the *presepi* and the treatment of the subject in art tended to become more elaborate. In the fifteenth century Benozzo Gozzoli introduced trees, birds, and other natural things, and instead of wintry snows, the earth was shown breaking into blossom. By and by, the train of pilgrims increased and the whole world was displayed on the march. The great Nativity of Bernadino Luini at Saronno illustrates this development of the once simple theme. Convents and rich families began to spend lavishly on their Christmas shows; increased care was bestowed on the scenery; Jerusalem, the holy city, appeared in the distance, and the perspective was managed with such skill that a surprising effect of length was given to the motley procession which wound down the mountain road. Trees, flowers, and animals enlivened the foreground. A magnificent specimen is preserved in the Certosa di San Martino above Naples. The lasting popularity of these exhibitions is proved by the fact that, a few winters ago, a moving mechanical *presepio* was shown at Milan, in which the figures were marionettes. It

was a pretty sight, and so discreetly arranged that it secured the patronage of the high ecclesiastical authorities. At the day performance the little theatre was always full of children and their nurses. Unfortunately, after the Nativity came a scene of the Massacre of the Innocents, with real screams, almost as blood-curdling as the screams in *Tosca*. But it was all much appreciated by the audience, for children bear out the remark of St. Augustine that people like that best on the stage which most harrows their feelings. Some slight movement of the figures is attempted now even in the churches; the three kings, for instance, are made to canter round on their mules, re-appearing—at suitable intervals. There is no doubt that among the poor this kind of spectacle excites deeply religious feelings. I shall not forget the passionate, earnest face of one young girl kneeling before a *presepio*—of what was she telling the Virgin Mother? The rich, if they go from habit, yet are touched—at least by those memories of childhood which are so close to religion.

It cannot be denied, however, that besides its devotional aspect, the *presepio* has always attracted the multitude as a beautiful show. Machiavelli mentions a gorgeous Nativity exhibited in 1466 "to give the people something else than public affairs to think about." Travellers came from far away to see such exhibitions. In 1587 Tasso visited the

presepio erected by Pope Sixtus V. in Santa Maria Maggiore,—once called *S. Maria ad praesepe* from its containing five boards which are said to have composed the original manger at Bethlehem. But of all the pictured mangers that which has obtained the widest fame is the one displayed at Santa Maria in Araceli. Lady Morgan and an infinite number of writers have described it. The figures are life-size, and the image of the Babe is that Santissimo Bambino which legend reports to have been carved from the branch of a tree on the Mount of Olives by a Franciscan friar and painted miraculously, though not artistically, by St. Luke. When I went to see the Bambino I asked the lay brother in attendance whether it still was taken out to visit the sick for whom mortal hope was past. "Oh, yes," he replied; "it went out yesterday." "Are there many cures?" I asked. "Certainly there are," was the answer, and no doubt a true one, for life may often be saved by raising the patient's *moral*. The image is covered with jewels, the gifts of the grateful.

No place except "Betelem, che 'l gran parto accolse in grembo," has so good a traditional right to be associated with Christmas as Santa Maria in Araceli. This right rests on a story which it is said can be traced to the eighth century, but I do not know where to look for mention of it before the

fourteenth. The story runs thus : When the question was proposed by the Roman Senate of deifying Augustus, the Emperor consulted a sibyl (or soothsayer) as to whether any one alive were greater than he. After the sibyl had performed some invocations, a vision appeared of a circle in which was a woman holding a little child. "This child," said the sibyl, "is greater than thou." At the same time a voice was heard saying, "Here is the altar of Heaven." These things happened on the first Christmas Day. Augustus built an altar on the spot, which was afterwards converted into the present Church.

In the octave of Christmas little Roman children still "preach," as it is called, before the Holy Child ; a sight which, even more than the *presepio* itself, draws crowds to the Araceli ; for, like all children of the South, they say their "pieces" with an infinite charm that raises half a smile and half a tear. Almost as soon as the institution of the Manger, there grew up the custom of speaking or singing before it. The privilege of expounding the event which it represented passed from friars or priests to peasants and children, and this added to the essentially popular character of the rite ; it became, as it were, a little Mass of the poor and pious laity. Lullabies were written to be sung to the Infant Jesus, many of them being composed in the person of the Virgin, and even believed by the people to have been sung

by her—a tradition perhaps known to Coleridge when he wrote :

A mother's song the Virgin Mother sung.

One beautiful Latin lullaby was reverenced, in particular, as the Virgin's own song, but there is no proof that any sacred *ninne nanne* existed before the lovely specimens written by the Franciscan Fra Jacopone da Todi, who lived in the same century as his master, and who is famous as author of the *Stabat Mater*. The poor friar showed an almost inspired knowledge of a mother's heart ; he almost fathomed the unfathomable—a mother's love. Umbria with its sun-painted hills, so like the hills of Palestine, gave birth to the chosen saint, poet, and painter of the Holy Child—Francis, Jacopone, and Raphael.

In the steps of Fra Jacopone followed a great company, ranging from immortal poets to the humblest folk-minstrel. Milton played his organ, Herrick his pipe, Crashaw his viol with pathetic tones. If Crashaw lacked the great Puritan's majestic sweep, he approached more nearly to that impassioned fervour, joined to a kind of confidential familiarity, which is the note of early Italian Christmas songs. His "Hymn sung by the shepherds in the Holy Nativity of our Lord God" alternates between the homely and the sublime ; between the vision to the mortal eye :

Poor world (said I), what will thou do
To entertain this starry stranger?
Is this the best thou can'st bestow—
A cold and not too cleanly manger?

and the spiritual vision:

We saw thee in Thy balmy nest,
Young Dawn of our eternal Day,
We saw thine eyes break from their East
And chase the trembling shades away.
We saw thee and we blessed the sight,
We saw thee by thine own sweet light.

A lesser poet, Patrick Carey, whose poems, written in the seventeenth century, were first published by Sir Walter Scott, composed one charming verse:

Look, how he shakes for cold,
How pale his lips are grown,
Wherein his limbs to fold,
Yet mantle has he none.
His pretty feet and hands
(Of late more pure and white
Than is the snow
That pains him so)
Have lost their candour quite.

This is very like the Italian folk-lullabies, though it is improbable that Carey was acquainted with them. They were known, no doubt, to Mrs. Browning, but her poem called "The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus" has other thoughts than those of the Italian folk-singer, who would prefer Raphael's healthy Babe with the goldfinch to the English poet's "child without the heart for play."

The songs and carols of the Holy Nativity cannot be even counted here. Saboly, the Provençal poet, called the "Troubaire de Betelèm," alone wrote one hundred and ten. From the point of view of literature, the finest Christmas poem, since Milton's hymn, is the *Natale* of Alessandro Manzoni, the following lines from which are considered by Italian critics an incomparable specimen of the "grand style":

L' angiol del ciel agli uomini
Nunzio di tanta sorte,
Non dei potenti volgesi
Alle vegliate porte;
Ma fra i pastor devoti
Al duro mondo ignoti,
Subito in luce appar!

Here every word tells and every word is noble and simple. The sentiment is purely Franciscan—the great welling-up sentiment of democracy. I cannot read these lines without thinking of one of the grand democratic perorations of Fra Agostino da Montefeltro, the humble brother whose eloquent voice so often crowded the city churches of Italy, not only with the faithful but with all the "sheep out of the stable,"—as a Milanese friend of mine designates "Jews, Turks, and Infidels" in what he believes to be most idiomatic English.

Nativity interludes and plays existed before the time of St. Francis; the first extant regular drama performed at Christmas belongs to the precious

manuscript of the Abbey of Saint-Benôit-sur-Loire, and it is one of the earliest specimens of a modern drama (as distinguished from mere dialogues) which we possess. Hrotswitha's imitations of Terence alone preceded it. The Saint-Benôit play is called *Hérode*. The shepherds (rather neglected in earlier art and literature) now make their formal appearance and describe how they have found the Babe lying between two dumb animals. The three kings follow with their offerings, which they present almost in the words of the Greek Christian poet Synesius: "Oh, King, take this gold. Gold is the symbol of kings. Take the myrrh. Myrrh is the symbol of tombs. Take the incense, for thou art truly God." The Infant Jesus is brought out to them, not by the Virgin but by two nurses; the non-appearance of the Madonna is, perhaps, to be attributed to a scruple, soon to disappear, as to showing her in the first moments of her motherhood.

If, however, Nativity mysteries existed before the *presepio*, they increased a hundredfold after the veneration of the Infant Saviour became a common practice. The Cumaean Sibyl usually appeared in them accompanied by Virgil, and Moses and Aaron, all the prophets, King David, Nebuchadnezzar, as well as Balaam's ass (with a little boy inside it), combined to make up what was dear to the mediaeval playgoer, an enormously long list of personages.

All of these figured in a mystery which was still performed a few years ago in Rouen Cathedral. In one Christmas play a hymn was sung to Venus—even in the Tempio Malatestiano at Rimini the riot of emancipated fancy scarcely could go farther. Miracle plays are supposed to have been invented by monks to draw the people away from the attractions of the ancient comedy, but the cure was at times worse than the disease. For what we should call downright profanity nothing can equal these fruits of the ages of faith. And yet in the rampant licence of the mediaeval mystery lay the germ of the splendid freedom of the Elizabethan theatre. It must be admitted, too, that in spite of extravagance, the miracle plays show, here and there, a true dramatic instinct which we might realise to a fuller extent if we could see them acted. Many travellers go to the wonderful plastic presentment of the Gospel story on the Sacro Monte of Varallo with minds set against it, but few come away without having received an ineffaceable impression. The same thing happens at Ober-Ammergau, and even at the ruder performances given by Tyrolese peasants, whose religious plays have not been improved to meet the demands of modern taste.

Still more popular than the Nativity play was the idyll, eclogue, or pastoral (as it was variously called) which treated only the episode of the shepherds.

Some good examples were written by the Spanish poet Juan de la Enzina towards the end of the fifteenth century. His shepherds, instead of being theologians in sheepskin, are taken straight from the brown Spanish hill-side; they sit round the fire of dry twigs and fragrant plants; they play dice for chestnuts, swear by the evangelists, and discuss such local matters as the death of the Sacristan—when suddenly an angel announces the birth of Christ and they all set off for Bethlehem as if it were the next parish. A Portuguese named Gil Vicente, who often wrote in Spanish, also produced some realistic idylls in which people talk of friars, hermits, breviaries, calendars, and papal bulls. After signing themselves with the cross the shepherds go to sleep; while they are asleep angels begin to sing, which wakes one old shepherd of the name of Gil, who rouses his comrade Bras and tells him that he has heard angelic strains. "Are you sure," says Bras, "that it was not crickets?" Gil scorns the suggestion and orders the others to go immediately to the village to buy a pipe, guitar, and flageolet and a baby's whistle as presents for the Infant Christ.

Innumerable Christmas pastorals sprang up in Italy in the seventeenth century. Every person with a pen made a point of writing one, from the poet of reputation to the obscure village priest. Some of these pieces were set to music by famous composers

(alas, where is their fame now?), in which form they came to be called oratorios, from the oratories of St. Philip Neri, where they were performed. Thus an epoch-making word came into currency; along the aisles of the future sounded the grand choruses of Handel and the thrilling flute-notes of Don Lorenzo Perosi, in whose *Natale del Redentore* there is something of the "ineffable sweetness" that filled the *Poverello* as he stood before the first *presepio*.

When the taste for bucolics declined, the pious pastorals suffered the same fate as the rest; but the peasants clung to them, and in some mountain villages of Piedmont they are still represented on the Christmas night. The best of the still-surviving specimens is the one performed in the valleys of Cuorgné. Count Nigra, the able Italian diplomatist, remembered having begun his career as an ambassador by figuring in it, as a child, in the character of a herald angel with wings of peacocks' feathers. To his enthusiasm for folk-lore we owe the publication of the text.

The necessary personages in this dramatic scene are eleven shepherds and one angel, but three angels are preferred when they can be had. Mary and Joseph do not appear. A side altar is converted into a manger, in which the image of the Babe lies. Midnight mass has advanced as far as the Credo when the performance opens with what is called an

"angelic prologue." In this homily, the congregation are requested to be very attentive—then, on this dark night, they will behold great portents. They will see the shepherds draw near to worship a new-born Babe, in whom, with melting hearts, they recognise their Redeemer. The prologue ends with the words: "Whoso desires happiness and justice, let him seek them in God, for they are not to be found among men, and now, may all things proceed with order and may we meet one day in heaven."

A knocking is heard at the chief entrance; the priest opens the door and the eleven shepherds walk into the church. They wear long white woollen cloaks and broad-brimmed hats which they keep on their heads. Each carries a staff in one hand and his offering in the other. Montano brings a lamb; Alceste, two pigeons; Volpino, honey; Silvio, fresh butter; Evandro, milk; Menalca, grapes (they are hung up in a dry place so as to keep till December). Tigrane carries a pair of turtle-doves; Titiro, apples; Polibeo, eggs; Mirteo, two chickens; Melibeo, cloth for swaddling clothes. The gifts remain with the priest, but, like the ancient sacrifice, they are in very truth offered to Deity. This custom has endeared the ceremonial to the poor, who are so fond of giving. They *feel* that their offerings actually supply the wants of their Infant Lord, and feeling is much more real than thinking or knowing.

The crowd, which densely fills the little church, leaves a clear space for the shepherds in the middle of the building. Montano remarks that here they are with their gifts, but he has no idea why Melibeo, the oldest shepherd, has called them hither while the sun is still asleep. Questions and answers gradually disclose the fact that Melibeo supposed, from the appearance of the heavens, the time to be come for the birth of Him who should fulfil the promise of Abraham. While they are speaking, Melibeo suddenly declares that even now a light illumines the sky, the grass grows green, streams freed from ice run with a sweet murmur, flowers burst forth, hill and valley smile as in April. The younger shepherds, overpowered by fear, inquire if any one ever saw so light a night, or rather, so light a day. The congregation take this transformation on faith, but there soon appears a tangible angel who invites the shepherds to follow him to the manger. "Here," he says, "is the august palace of the Word made man."

In the next scene, the shepherds, by their homely remarks, elicit from the angel an exposition of Christian doctrine :

Alceste. Look in how poor and rude a shed
The King of kings has found a bed.
Angel. Here 'twas he uttered his first cry,
That you might learn humility.
Montano. Naked he meets the wintry night.

Angel. The road is hard to heaven's height.
Titiro. He shakes with cold in every part.
Angel. Yet doth a flame ignite his heart.
Melibeo. He never murmurs nor complains.
Angel. That you may learn to bear your pains.
Volpino. Poor rags his body scarcely hide.
Angel. Thus to reprove the sins of pride.
Evandro. It seems as if the ox and cow
Were drawing nigh to warm him now.
Angel. The succour thoughtless beasts supply,
Less feeling man shall oft deny.
Silvio. In what deep poverty he lies!
Angel. To teach you greatness to despise.
Mirteo. He seems beyond all mortal aid.
Angel. Who trusts in God is ne'er afraid.
Menalca. His woeful state to pity moves.
Angel. So heaven tries the soul it loves.
Polibeo. His childish tears are falling fast.
Angel. Blood will be there for tears at last.
Tigrane. How soft his limbs! How delicate!
Angel. One day the scourge will lacerate.
In this rude cradle you may see
Even Him whose mighty hand,
And whose eterne command,
Formed heaven, created earth, and ordered hell to be.

At this point each shepherd deposits his gift. Apologies are offered for the poorness of the present, except in the case of the lamb—an exception which shows a rare sense of the fitness of things possessed by the forgotten author whose work has lasted longer than his name. The dedication of the lamb is solemn: "Pure as thou art pure; guiltless as thou art guiltless; fated victim as thou art fated victim: Lord, may this my gift be acceptable in Thy sight."

Of the other offerings, it is confessed that they are but common things, though they are the very best of their kind. (This is exactly what a real peasant says when he makes you a present.) The apples are of the sweetest; the cloth took years to weave; there never was such honey; the milk is milked from the pet ewe. But what are such things for a king? Each giver, after his little speech, adds himself to his gift:

Ei t' offre tutto assieme
Il dono e il donator.

Sometimes a kid, a wolf-skin, a hare, or a few flowers are added to the gifts. The following rhyme accompanies the flower offering:

These I gathered as I went,
Pretty flowers with sweetest scent,
Which among the ice and snow
In the ice-bound meadow grow.
Let them, too, Thy coming hail,
Let them, too, their homage yield;
Thou, the lily of the vale,
Thou, the flower of all the field.

When the gifts have been presented, Montano says that since their duty is done, they will go forth and spread the good news abroad. "Let everything be glad and rejoice. Let the Holy Name be graven on the bark of all the trees; let the air whisper it and the crystal fountain reply. The birds, the wild beasts, and the flocks shall learn to pronounce it, and from every rock and mount and abyss Echo will repeat the name of the Child born this night."

The priest finishes the Mass, and the congregation join in a carol :

I hear the people singing
Their songs of gladdest praise ;
The very skies are ringing
With sweet angelic lays.
Rejoice, my heart, and sing with them,
For Christ is born in Bethlehem.

Out of the church the mountain-folk depart into the silence of the Alpine winter night. Each lights his torch, and takes his way slowly across the snow to his own dwelling. Above shine the innumerable stars.

In the Italian plains no plays or mysteries are now performed, but in a corner of the cottage the manger is still arranged with moss and a waxen Babe and, if possible, a few wooden or paper animals. Before this the children kneel. I have in my hand the Christmas letters of four little Italian peasant girls. Bettina, the eldest, promises "di pregare fervorosamente il Divino Infante di conservare fra noi la nostra degna Signora." Camilla, the second, writes : "Non mancherò in questi solenni giorni di inalzare preci al Bambino celeste di ricompensare i suoi benefici." Barbara, the third, inscribes "V.G.B." (Viva Gesù Bambino) at the top of her letter. She writes : "Ecco le feste del Santo Natale che io desiderava tanto. Ora voglio scriverle una letterina per dimostrare il mio amore. Pregherò Gesù

Bambino che la faccia vivere lunghi anni felice e contenta." Evelina, the youngest (aged seven), writes in a large round hand: "Ecco le feste del Santo Natale; pregherò Gesù Bambino per Lei."

I would as soon attempt to translate Dante as to try to put these innocent outpourings into English, but I give them here because they are not without interest as documents in the history of the peasants' religion, south of the Alps.

The Italian peasants fought hard for their old gods, and they did more—they suffered for them. Then, in time, they adapted themselves to the new faith or the new faith adapted itself to them. Taine said that the true religion of Italy was the worship of the Madonna, and another writer, E. Gebhart, said that the true God of Italy was the Bambino. Since they wrote thus socialism has invaded the cottage and indifferentism has taken possession of the palace, and yet the heart of the people is unchanged. One thinks of Byron's lines, which seem to have acquired a new and deeper meaning:

> But in a higher niche, alone but crowned,
> The Virgin-Mother of the God-born Child,
> With her Son in her blessed arms, looked round;
> Spared by some chance when all beside was spoiled;
> She made the earth below seem holy ground.
> This may seem superstition, weak or wild,
> But even the faintest relics of a shrine
> Of any worship wake some thoughts divine.

XV

THE MODERN PASTORAL IN ITALY

It is always useful to remember how completely the Renaissance in Italy was what its name implies—a rebirth, not a new birth. The foreign deluges were powerless to alter the Italian temperament. Virgil's prophetic words came true: though the original stock might be modified and reinvigorated from abroad, it would still retain its name, its customs, and its language. Nay, more, only those incomers would remain who lost their own nationality and grew to be one with the Italian people.

In a narrower sense the continuity of Letters had never been broken, though in the eclipse of the Dark Ages the threads are lost sight of. Such men as Cassiodorus and Boëthius were pure Italians nurtured in the lap of Roman learning. We must always bear in mind that for one such man whose eminent position and public charges caused his name to be handed down, there were hundreds, without doubt, approaching him in scholarship and tastes, who, in their quiet way, kept the lamp of learning alight.

The attribution of this mission entirely to monks is one of those off-hand popular judgments which call for revision. When we go from Boëthius, the high-born Roman, to Pier delle Vigne, the low-born Neapolitan, we see the same thing. Literature at the court of the splendid Suabian as at that of the wise Ostrogoth was represented by Italians, and in Sicily the poets who lent lustre to the reign of the Norman William were again of Italian blood.

A real continuity of spirit means, more than anything else, the power of producing new forms. Imitation is not heredity. If the seed of Italic culture were alive, it would one day yield a new efflorescence. This is what happened in Dante. As every one knows, Dante first thought of writing his *Commedia* in Latin. The fact, certainly, is not surprising. Up till then Italian had been used by poets as the musician uses a mandoline ; who ever thought of singing of heaven and hell to such an instrument?

But Dante made the discovery that Italian, instead of being a mandoline, was a magnificent organ. His profound patriotism enlightened him on another point: to be a great nation Italy must have a speech of her own which should be at once illustrious and vulgar ; capable of the highest perfection and understood by all. He undertook to give Italy such a speech. Not that it is true to say, as has often been said, that Dante created Italian ; some one else had

created it—the people of Italy. This is one of the wonders of history; how, unaided by literature, during ages in which every even moderately educated man wrote and largely spoke in Latin, the people of Italy made for themselves a language which by the time of Dante was simply the Italian we now have. To appreciate the marvel it is only necessary to compare a sonnet of Pier delle Vigne with a passage from Robert Langland, or a canto of the *Purgatorio* with one of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Dante's supreme merit was that he simply selected; he did not alter or refine or manipulate. Saturated as he was with classical lore, he left Italian what he found it, a pure vernacular. It is wonderful how few Latinisms there are in his writings. A Tuscan himself, he had no great affection for Tuscan modes; he admitted words which the later Tuscan purists called dialect and barbarous. Dante was not a "polite poet" any more than, with all his learning, he was a pedant. He was a supreme artist who never allowed his art to appear. As has been well said by Carducci, there is in his poetry "la ingenuità del canto popolare, come allodola che dagli umidi seminati d' autunno, si leva trillando fin che s' incontra e perde, ebra di gioia, nel sole."

The same high authority points out that Dante was faithful to the genius of the people even in the choice of his metre, which is that of the narrative

poems that used to be recited by the wandering balladist or story-teller at the street-corners.

The references to peasant-life in the *Divina Commedia* are not numerous, but they are of great interest. They are all in the form of similes, which, in Dante, serve as actual guides to the mind's eye—introduced not for the sake of embellishment, though they do embellish, but to enable the reader to follow the action of a series of familiar pictures, or, to put it differently, to think in images.

No one could have written this opening to the twenty-fourth canto of the *Inferno* who was not a close observer of rustic character :

> What time the hoar-frost on the ground simulates its white sister but quickly wears away, the little peasant who all things lacks, leaves his bed and looks out at the whitened country : whereupon he slaps his thigh and goes back into the house and grumbles up and down like the mole that knows not what it does. Then he recovers his spirits ; hope revives as he beholds how in a few hours the world has changed its face. And he takes his crook and forth he drives the sheep, poor fools, to pasture.

English words cannot catch the grave smile that illuminates the lines — quintessentially realistic and yet so tender. How give in English the shading of "villanello," "pecorelle"? Though for this last I have ventured on a Shakespearean substitute as representing the sentiment behind the word, to convey which is the real office of the translator.

The peasant who sees the fire-flies darting in the valley "when the swarms of daytime insects yield to the evening gnat"; the goatherd who rests upon his staff as his flock that lately scoured the heights reposes, meekly chewing the cud, beneath the trees; the guardian of the kine, who lodges abroad beside his sleeping wealth, watchful the while that no wild thing comes anigh to scatter and affright—these and other similes are examples of condensed description, the truth of which can only be appreciated when a scene like that described comes before our eyes. The Tuscan poet, Giusti, said that he had never rightly understood canto xxvii. of the *Purgatorio* till he visited the Casentino district, where he saw the nomadic shepherds and herdsmen who came up at the beginning of the summer to pass the hot months in the hills, bringing with them the utensils for making cheese and a small shelter under which they slept close to the herd or flock.

In each of these allusions the peasant is associated with a natural scene of which he is at once the complement and the thinking mirror. There is kindness in them, not scorn; Dante's scorn was for evil-doers. Even the words in the *Purgatorio* about the rough, untamed mountaineer who is speechless with amazement when he first arrives in town, have not the bad sense which some translators have given them, because *stupito* means, of course, "surprised"

and not "stupid."[1] At the same time it is more than doubtful if Dante shared his master's conviction of the felicity of the husbandman, or Virgil's respect, which was unquestionably sincere, for the qualities required to make a good agriculturist. The great truth that what is dismissed as manual labour (as though the hands worked of themselves any more than the hand writes of itself) needs as much intelligence in its way as the writing of books was, when Dante lived, deposited at the bottom of the deepest of wells. The peasant, who was almost a god to Homer and almost a priest to Virgil, had fallen from his high estate. How low he had fallen, and the outcome in literature of the debased opinion of him, cannot be discussed now. We are concerned at present with his literary rescue.

It must be owned that in its origin the new pastoral poetry was simply an academical hobby. Eclogues were written because Virgil had written eclogues. Virgil was the poet, the Master, the Genius of the Modern Pastoral in Italy, the link between two civilisations, the one name that had never been forgotten, the one personality that lived with the very life of the Italian race. Who doubted that

[1] Are not all poets wrong in representing the countryman as so easily impressed? During an exhibition at Venice hundreds of peasants, led by their priests, profited by the excursion trains to see the city. One old woman from the mountains said, after visiting St. Mark's, that "it would be a beautiful church if the inside was white-washed." The true peasant mind is critical—after a fashion.

Paul wept over his grave? His fame was beyond the need of scholars or culture; the people had taken him to their hearts and enshrined him there. The story that at Mantua they placed offerings of flowers on a sort of altar below his statue is too likely not to have been true. A Malatesta (of those who were madly pious instead of being madly pagan) caused the statue to be destroyed in 1397. But Virgil remained, the one literary artist who had been made the object of a cult.[1]

Virgil wrote bucolics and it was therefore proper to write them. What was not immediately realised was that the real charm of the Virgilian eclogues depended not on his reading Theocritus as he himself was read by the poets of the Renaissance, but on his having been born and bred in country scenes, on his mind being so penetrated by the Lombard landscape which he knew, that he cannot help setting it

[1] The statue was of Parian marble and probably the work of a Greek sculptor. It is possible that it was erected during the poet's lifetime, in which case it was, no doubt, a portrait. We may suppose that it was copied, in its general lines, in the seated figure erected in the town hall of Mantua in 1227 by the noble Brescian who then held the office of *Podestà*, Loderengo Martinengo. This statue still exists, and those who visited the Rome Exhibition of 1911 saw it reproduced in the Lombard pavilion. It represents Virgil as a kind of glorified peasant, with long hair, which was not the fashion in Rome in the age of Augustus. The face has been described justly as "grave and beautiful," but it is not a great work of art—great art had ended and not begun again. Yet how interesting it is to find the chief magistrate of Mantua engaged in putting up a statue to the *Altissimo Poeta* nearly forty years before Dante and Giotto were born! A little time before, Loderengo Martinengo had proclaimed Virgil "*Signore di Mantova*," with the approval of the united communes, and money was coined with his effigy.

down in the middle of a Sicily which he had read about. They failed to understand that truthfulness was the rod by which their own work would also be ultimately measured.

Truth, however, is not always literal. In art there is the truth which shows the things seen as we all see them, and the truth which reveals the archetypes of the things seen ; which, by generalising, arrives at the type not of one but of all. The writers of the new pastorals did not begin by aiming at either ; they merely sought to write pretty verses sprinkled with classical names. The pastoral was used as the mouthpiece of private loves and hates, friendships and jealousies ; it was now a courtly panegyric, now a political or ecclesiastical satire. But in its progressive development something more genuine arose under forms which are still artificial. Pastoral poetry became an embodied sigh of relief at having got out of the fasting and fighting Middle Ages into purer air.

Two eclogues written in Latin are attributed on what seems good evidence to Dante. It appears that towards the end of his life he received an invitation to go to Bologna from a brother poet who, from his skill in bucolics, was called Giovanni del Virgilio. The invitation and the reply were in the form of eclogues, and these were followed at some distance of time by another on each side. The Bolognese poet,

while professing the utmost reverence for his friend's genius, chides him a little for using what Dante in his reply calls the "trivial words that fall from women's lips." Biographically this poetic correspondence is of considerable value, but Dante's part in it—designed on purpose to show that he could be rigidly classical if he pleased—lacks the flashes of insight into country realities that are to be found in the *Commedia*.

Petrarch, Boccaccio, and a host of lesser luminaries of the fourteenth century wrote Latin eclogues, for it was thought for a long time that Latin was still the correct tongue when you were going to talk with shepherds. A hundred years later, Boiardo and Mantuan continued to hand down that opinion. The last name is important in the history of pastoral and almost dear to English ears. "Ah, good old Mantuan. I may speak of thee as a traveller doth of Venice :

Vinegia, Vinegia,
Chi non te vede, ei non te pregia.

Old Mantuan, old Mantuan. Who understandeth thee not, loves thee not." One must conclude that Giovan Battista Mantovano was loved by Shakespeare as he had been admired and copied by Spenser, and as if that were not enough for one man of letters, he has been recently beatified. The Carmelite monk whose worldly pastorals are biting satires, while his religious eclogues offer the most wonderful harlequinade of pagan and scriptural personages ever

presented even in the fifteenth century, is, in spite of his ultra-classicism, the originator of the new rustic poetry. He knew the Italian rustic, and notwithstanding the temptations of elegant Latinity in which he was so great a master, he makes him speak as he speaks. This, it may strongly be guessed, is why Shakespeare liked him. He leaves the peasant uncouth, almost repellent, but real. Although he was certainly not conscious of assuming such a part, he comes down to us also as the defender of the peasant at a time when he stood sorely in need of one. While others were accusing the *villani* of every impiety and impurity, Mantuan praises their good morals and sincere faith. It is always a gain to be reminded that every medal has two sides and not one, and that one belonging to the province of Zola. Mantuan's sincerity in preferring the charms and occupations of the country to the corrupt splendour of Society in the days of Leo X., is proved by his own retirement to his mountain monastery. He had no poetic sensibility, but Italians do not need this for them to enjoy a fine spot and pure air any more than it was needed by their Roman predecessors.

It is interesting to compare with the descriptions by Pliny or Symmachus of their country-houses, the sonnet-sequence of the months by the Tuscan poet, Folgore da San Gemignano, who lived about 1260. Nothing was ever more delicately epicurean than his

programme for all the year, more full of health, of life, of sane enjoyment. What month without its pleasures? In January you can go out several times a day and pelt the country girls with snowballs; in February you chase the stag and the wild boar and come home with mirthful songs to generous fare and to sound sleep; for March you have the seaside with fishing-parties and good company and "not a priest or a monastery anywhere in sight"; flowery April is the time to sing and dance *à la Provençale* "to the new German instruments"; May the month of garlanded balconies and stolen kisses; in June, when there is the first heat, you dwell up on a little eminence and pass the idle days under the trellises of citron and orange; August takes you to a castle in the Alps with a well-trained horse to ride at morn and eve; in September the falcons' hoods are slipped; in October there is bird-snaring (the inglorious Roman sport with which Dante, alone of Italian poets, seems to have been out of patience); finally, December sees the Wanderer safe in a city in the plains with fires half up the chimney and carpets spread on the floors—it sounds quite English. And to keep up his spirits, indoor amusements not unconnected, sad to say, with a little gambling.

Another early poet should be mentioned here, Franco Sacchetti, whose ballads and catches have the true fragrance of the fields. His peasant girls are

life itself, no stiff Arcadians fearing to spoil their dresses, but lively, romping girls; one hears their very laughter as he may hear it to-day. They persuade the miller to weigh them, and tease each other as to who weighs most; they rush, they jump, they fly from the shower, they fall in the mud, they pick and drop their flowers, they chatter all at once, start when they see a grasshopper, scream when they see a snake; they are happy at home in the little cottage with father and mother, but nowise averse from love, yet thinking little of it, full of innocent joy that asks no bettering. There is a note in Franco Sacchetti, a lyrist scarcely remembered, that Italian poetry never quite caught again. Who else has given sisters to Nausicaa and her handmaids—the fearless, hardy girls who drive the oxen, wash the clothes, sing, and run, and play at ball?

The Latin eclogues of the fourteenth century had two poetic children of more consequence that they were to modern literature: the mingled prose and verse pastoral of which the earliest was the *Ameto* of Boccaccio (written 1342), and by far the most famous, the *Arcadia* of Jacopo Sannazzaro (written 1489-1504); and secondly, the pastoral play, which again became the progenitor of the opera.

The *Arcadia* was a work, if not in every sense original, at least intensely individual, a far more important point. Individuality is the quality which

vitalises works of imagination. A great landscape painter copies his scenes from nature, but unlike the photographer, he throws his own temperament into the copy. It has been shown conclusively that Sannazzaro borrowed not only from Virgil but from nearly every writer of antiquity who treated rural themes. Here it is no question of plagiarism ; the anthology of beautiful ideas in the *Arcadia* could not have been meant to deceive any one in an age when the Classics were passionately studied. Still the borrowing exists, and it says much for the genius of the Neapolitan poet that the net result is—Jacopo Sannazzaro. The individual character of the work sprang in a great measure from its source in a private sorrow. Sannazzaro as a child of eight had loved, in a childish way, but irrevocably, a little girl of his own age, his frequent playmate. When they grew to be youth and maiden his love grew with him, but being of a timid nature and fearing, it would seem, dismissal, he never disclosed an affection which, in spite of her maidenly shyness, little Carmosina may have very likely shared.

At last Jacopo was in so wretched a plight that he thought of suicide, from which he was only kept, as he naïvely admits, by want of courage ; as an alternative he left Naples on a journey in France, where he hoped to forget his love. This, however, proved impossible, and he started suddenly home-

wards, resolute to put his fortune to the test, but only to find on reaching home that Carmosina was dead.

The *Arcadia* was for Sannazzaro the Katharsis of this sorrow. It was not written at once, but a life of singular purity and of entire fidelity in love and in friendship had kept clear and sweet the memory of his young romance, while the lapse of time allowed it to pass from the particular phase into the general and hence become a possible subject of analysis. Sannazzaro was one of the first writers of fiction to attempt a psychological analysis of the growth of sentiment. The *Arcadia* is, for the rest, before all a poet's fairy-tale, and its popularity came precisely from its detachment from any actual conditions of life. The scenery was real; it was the beautiful scenery of Naples and Salerno, in which Sannazzaro took an inexhaustible pleasure, and to many north of the Alps the *Arcadia* came as a first revelation of Southern Nature. Even now its graces of style and what may be called its personal charm (since some books have a personal charm as well as some people) keep it from the oblivion into which the various imitations of it have fallen, always excepting the *Arcadia* of Sidney—a work of less literary completeness than its model, but one which it is delightful to think of as the summer pastime of a hero.

The Court of Charles d'Anjou at Naples in the thirteenth century witnessed the first indication of a

secular rustic comedy in the shape of a little piece composed by Adam de la Halle on the basis of the old French popular cycle of *Robin et Marion*. This, however, had no connection with Italian pastoral plays, which, if derived from anything, were rather indebted to the early Umbrian mysteries. But the passage from the idyll, which, from the time of Theocritus, generally consisted in dialogue, to the acted scene was so natural that we need not inquire what suggested it. The Italian pastoral drama is often described as beginning with *Il Sacrificio* of Beccari, a writer of the sixteenth century, but it is difficult to see what the *Orfeo* of Poliziano was, unless it was a pastoral play. It was, in fact, called from the beginning a "tragedy," though it is not certain whether Poliziano gave it more than the modest title of "favola." Written in two days, amid the noise and hurry of the fêtes in honour of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga's visit to Mantua in 1472, the *Orfeo* was thought lightly of by its author, who was almost as great an artist in lyrical verse as the Milton of the shorter pieces. He was inclined to consign his "not too creditable child" to obscurity, but it was immediately too popular for that to be possible. Granting the reversal of the relative importance of words and music, it is still easy for any one who has heard Gluck's beautiful opera to have an idea of the spell that bound the first

spectators of Poliziano's play, which was also interspersed with music of some simple sort. That spell is the renewal in us of the emotions of the Young World; the chords of joy and sorrow in their elementary essential forms responding to the touch of Love and Death. The *Orfeo* was succeeded by many "favole" in the sixteenth and early part of the seventeenth century; Beccari in the *Sacrificio*, already mentioned, while keeping the name of "favola" produced an elaborate play; Ottavio Rinuccini called his pastoral, *Dafne*, a "dramma musicale"—which indicates a new departure. After these and others like them, came two really important works, the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini and the *Aminta* of Tasso. Within its limits, *Aminta* is a poem of perfect beauty; for as a poem it must be judged, not as a play. But there is no part of it so engraved on the mind of the lover of outdoor things as the lovely description of Armida's garden in the *Gerusalemme*, to which we must also turn for Tasso's pathetic picture of an old peasant happy in his poverty:

> La nostra povertà vile e negletta:
> Altrui vile e negletta, a me si cara . . .

The nymphs in *Aminta* are far indeed away from such homely realities.

The *Pastor Fido* was the work of a courtier and man of the world "who wrote poetry too." And

what was singular, was that this poetry, laboriously executed with the avowed purpose of rivalling Tasso, came out, not excruciating like the mathematician's fugue, but so incontestably exquisite in structure that critics have never decided whether to rank the *Pastor Fido* below *Aminta* or equal with it. Talent was rarely so near succeeding in a race with genius. Guarini thought well to introduce the satiric and the erotic into his pastoral, and Cardinal Bellarmine is said to have told him that the *Pastor Fido* had done more mischief to morals and religion than Luther and Calvin. The subject is one of the most purely romantic stories of antiquity, that of Coresus and Callirrhoe, and in spite of its mythological and neo-classical form, Guarini's play has some noticeable points of affinity with modern romanticism. He altered and on the whole improved the story. A young priest of Diana is faithless to his vows from love of an Arcadian nymph. In consequence, a pestilence descends on the land, which the goddess consents to arrest only if the nymph or some one in her place is offered as a living sacrifice. As a voluntary victim is not forthcoming, the nymph is conducted to Diana's temple for immolation. The priest, her lover, must do the deed ; but when he raises the sacrificial knife which is to slay her, he plunges it into his own breast. The vicarious offering satisfies the goddess, but the nymph kills

herself on her lover's body. In the original legend the priest, who serves not Diana but Bacchus, is the instigator of the god in causing the epidemic which is inflicted because a nymph of Calydon has rejected his suit. This version would not agree with modern sentiment, but it leads up to a final situation which is perhaps stronger : the priest, stung by remorse at his too successful vengeance, commits suicide to save his victim.

Besides the Arcadian pastorals in prose and verse, another kind of idyll made its appearance in Italy which owed nothing to tradition. Its creator was that prince among humanists, Lorenzo de' Medici, who, like every one else, exercised his skill in the ideal pastoral, into which he infused a freshness and a distinction not often attained. Few eclogues have stood the test of time as triumphantly as his *Covinto*. But on a happy day, Lorenzo looked over Arcadia into Tuscany. It is strange that the poets who were composing so much about imaginary shepherds and shepherdesses had not listened with more attention to the beautiful real folk-poetry of the Italian peasant. That they did not listen to it we have not much proof before Poliziano, in whose *rispetti* there are signs of the folk-poet's influence. Poliziano really knew the country ; in his admirable stanzas describing country-life in *La Giostra* there is much more than a merely artistic welding of Greek and

Latin reminiscences. But it was left to Lorenzo de' Medici to speak the very language, the common everyday tongue, of the Tuscan countryside where he rested in his splendid villas from the cares of princes and the burden of a great intellect. In *La Nencia di Barberino* he brings close to us a figure that flits about in the books of old travellers in Italy from Montaigne downwards: a charming figure in a broad straw hat and a costume always becoming and sometimes costly, with the brightest eyes looking from under arched eyebrows, the head small and well-shaped with delicately modelled ears, and the mouth sweetly laughing and sweetly speaking—the very mouth to prattle in accents that make professors weep with envy. This quizzical and sprightly maiden is the complete opposite of languid nymphs.

To her Vallera, the goatherd of Barberino, addresses his love, admiration, hope, and fear in stanzas which one reads at a breath, so natural, so living are they in their sunny grace as of a Tuscan landscape. How far had Lorenzo in his mind that intention of parody which caused Gay to immortalise Blouzelinda and Buxoma? Some doubts have been expressed as to whether he had any such intention, but the doubters, in love with Nencia, are a little wilfully blind to the unromantic character of the compliments paid to her. The truth seems to be that while it apparently did not occur to Gay that

his rustic rhymes, in spite of the intolerable nomenclature, were proofs, not of the unfitness, but of the admirable suitability of kindred subjects for poetry, Lorenzo, a poet of higher order than Gay, did perceive that Nencia was a delightful creature, and that in her way, although of flesh and blood and a good cook, she might be as poetic as the most diaphanous of nymphs. The grain of irony, however, though it was but a grain, had the effect of making the picture not altogether true. The portrait is less fair than the original. The real peasant girl and her peasant lover have more poetry in them than Nencia and Vallera. Where in Lorenzo's poem are those lyric flights which we meet constantly in folk-songs? There is truth but there is not all the truth, and the part suppressed is the more beautiful.

On the other hand, we may be sure that his little poem called *La Caccia col Falcone* does not lose in veracity by the suppression of all the sentimental associations which we are used to attach to that form of sport; nothing could be more lifelike than the prosaic but amusing talk of the peasants who have the care of the dogs and the hawks, with their squabbles and reconciliations. We can almost see the dogs answering to their names:

> Chiama Tamburo, Pezuolo, e Martello,
> La Foglia, la Castagna, e la Guerrina,
> Fagiano, Fagianin, Rocca e Capello,
> E Friza, e Biondo, Bamboccio e Rossina,

Ghiotto, la Torta, Viola e Pestello,
E Serchio e Fuse e 'l mio Buontempo vecchio
Zambraco, Buratel, Scaccio, e Pennechio—

a list which, with that of Ovid, would make the basis of a chapter I should like to write on the names of animals. Buontempo must have been Lorenzo's own dog, to whom he thus secured a little space in the House of Fame where Du Bellay established for ever his cat Belaud.

The Magnificent had a profoundly human penetration into the humble life of the very poor, but the proof of it, far more than in *Nencia* or the *Caccia*, is to be found in the fanciful allegory to which he gave the name of *Ambra* after the Medicean villa at Poggio a Caiano, above the Ombrone. Ambra had been already celebrated by Poliziano in exquisite Latin verses.

Lorenzo's poems treat the two rivers, Ombrone and Arno, in the most approved neo-classical style, when we come on a sudden, almost with shock, to a brief interlude of intense descriptive directness. The subject is one of those terrible and unexpected floods caused by the melting of the snows or by torrential rain, which turn a peaceful stream into an engine of awful destruction beyond the power of man to control or arrest. One must have observed a swollen river rushing madly towards the Mediterranean down what was, perhaps, the day before a dry

shingly bed with hardly enough of water for the washerwomen to wash their linen in, to form an idea of the dread terror of Nature's changes. Lorenzo de' Medici's lines describe one aspect of the desolation : "Scarcely was the scared peasant woman in time to unbar the stable to the beasts ; she carries her crying child in a basket ; the elder girl follows, her shoulders bent under the weight of wretched linen and wool. The rest of the old household things are floating around ; the pigs swim and the oxen stir distraught ; the little sheep will never again be shorn. Some of the family have taken refuge upon the house-tops ; huddled on the roof, they look down upon their poor wealth, all the fruit of their long labour and all their hope—and from their fear they groan not, nor do they speak words : the fear for life that fills their sad hearts. Nor do they make account of what they held most dear ; so does the greater care drive out all others."

Then we return to the dancing brightness of *Ombrone Amante Superbo* as if in joyous rebound, but who can read that description even in the ashes of translation without being touched almost to tears ?

After *Nencia* there was the *Beca* of Lorenzo's friend Luigi Pulci, of whom he says in *La Caccia* that just when people were looking for him, he had gone off brooding into a coppice with some fancy in his head :

Vorrà fantasticar forse un sonetto.

Then, the *Silvana* of Doni, the *Tonia* of Simeoni, and many other imitations were produced in which the naturalness of *Nencia* was rarely caught, while the tendency to parody became more pronounced and irritating. One exception must be made: the *Lamento di Cecco da Varlungo* by Prior Francesco Baldovini is a delightful poem, and if Sandra is a less living character than Nencia, Cecco is certainly more attractive than Vallera; when he tells in his caressing Tuscan dialect how he has taught a jay to talk like a Christian and has tamed a little hare "which lies down with my Giordano" (the dog), we agree with him that Sandra is an "assassina" to despise such pretty offerings, to which he would gladly add his heart, only she has had that since long ago. This poem was greatly liked by Metastasio. The gay little comedy of *La Tancia*, of Michelagnolo Buonarroti (1611), should also not be passed over without praise. The peasants who live at cross purposes, and the insufferably conceited *cittadino* whom Tancia despises while he is lost in admiration of his own generosity in wishing to marry her, seem ready-made for a comic opera. Instead of irony there is fun, and we are much the gainers. Had the authors of this style of rustic poetry more often escaped from the strain of false humour which vitiated it from its birth, it would have borne far other fruits.

Meanwhile the Arcadian style rose in repute and

sank in quality. There was not a scribbling Abbate, a fashionable grand lady, a beardless and brainless rhymester who did not call him or herself an Arcadian and form one of a literary society dedicated to these pastimes. The movement had its good side; it espoused the cause of pure Italian diction; it made literature popular; it contributed to the happiness of a great many harmless individuals. It became, of course, a sort of log-rolling and mutual admiration institution, but any method of bringing together cultivated people is not to be lightly condemned. One work, difficult to classify, but connected in a general way with outdoor poetry, the *Bacco in Toscana* of Francesco Redi, emerges, splendid in *verve*, in merriment, in absolute spontaneity, from the frigid mass of literature in the seventeenth century. It sparkles and glows and overflows even as the generous wines which it celebrates, with an innocent glee that might disarm a teetotaller.

By a curious chance it was in Sicily, its birthplace, that the idyll took a new impulse of genuine, if not great poetry, in the charming dialect poems of Giovanni Meli. From Sicily has also come the new treatment of rural life initiated by Giovanni Verga, which has penetrated the arts of music and painting, and of which the full development belongs to the future.

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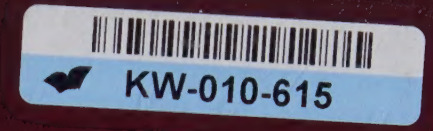
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